UNTO THE HEIGHTS OF SIMPLICITY

JOHANNES REIMERS

420D

To

Genevieve Peters —

To be simple is to
be sincere. To be
sincere is to be a
friend. —

I am yours unto
the heights of simple
city Johannes Peters.

May 29 — 1904.

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UNTO THE HEIGHTS OF SIMPLICITY

BY

JOHANNES REIMERS

Man is fallen; nature is erect and serves as a differential thermometer, detecting the presence or absence of the sentiment in man.

EMERSON.

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UNTO THE HEIGHTS OF SIMPLICITY

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Unto the Heights of Simplicity

I

LYDER VAN MEEREN had passed the *Examen artium* at the Christiania University.

He and three other youths, with downy upper lips and white student caps, had returned to their respective homes in Bergen, walking all the way across country, — a feat which at that time was very fashionable.

They had returned, these four *bons amis*, with sunburned faces in place of those bleached, tired countenances presumed to be the result of their ardent mental work in a student's dingy attic. Inhaling the fragrance from woods and mountain wastes, listening to the song of the cascades and the wild steps of

the wind across the blooming moors, they forgot their dreams of future positions in the king's service, forgot everything except that they were young.

Old Herr van Meeren was very proud of his only son.

True, Lyder had passed anything but a brilliant examination; but once Herr van Meeren had despaired of ever seeing him with the student's tasselled cap. Lyder had occasioned his father a great deal of anxiety on account of his unreliability and persistent lack of interest in study.

The one, of all others, who took the most pride in Lyder's success was Helga, although, indeed, there had not always been a brotherly and sisterly feeling between the two.

He was but a year older than she, and during their childhood together he had teased her unmercifully; besides, she could not for a long time get rid of the recollection of those disagreeable weekly scenes between her brother and father, when Lyder brought

home from school the teacher's written complaint of his conduct, — he did not study his lessons and often played truant. Yet Helga, with sisterly faithfulness, had always begged him to do better, though all in vain. Lyder preferred to roam far into the lonely mountains, where he found a happiness, the source of which his boyish mind did not comprehend. So, week after week, it was the same thing over again, until Helga had come to feel almost a dislike for her brother.

In those days the only one who showed Lyder sympathy was his mother.

"He is such a handsome boy," she said to her sister, the childless widow of a high official. "He shows such refined interests and inclinations."

She was a beautiful woman, Fru van Meeren, and must have been still more so in her youth. But her gay laughter had disappeared with the years, and something hard would now often show itself in her expression. She lived a retired and — so her friends said — an embittered life, in her large,

antique Hanseatic mansion behind the high, well-kept hawthorn hedges.

Between Herr van Meeren and his wife existed none of that warmth which makes home happy. His cold, polite conduct towards her was not merely the result of his business habits.

The children had never seen it otherwise, and noticed it only in a vague, half-comprehending way; but other people, who thought they knew all about it, spoke of the why and wherefore, — Herr van Meeren had not been true to his wife, and she was aware of the fact.

In her somewhat haughty way, she seemed all absorbed in her household, looking after the many servants, who, far from loving her, gossiped of the proud, mute manner in which she treated her husband.

But now, when Lyder had returned and given them all so much happiness, Helga forgave him, and came nearer to him, day after day, through her visible, sisterly pride and love. She began to think that if she

had shown him that long ago, she might have had far more influence over him; and in consequence she blamed herself for part of his failings.

Lyder was certainly attractive to look upon, in his light-coloured summer suit and white student cap adorned with a cockade bearing the miniature head of Minerva in silver, with his soft intimation of a blond mustache, his light hair, curled about the ears; and then his nonchalance of manners, the very way he tipped his cap, — ah, there were times when he perfectly fascinated her. It filled her with the happiest sensation of pride to walk with him evenings on "Smaastrandgaden," the fashionable boulevard, where, leaning on his arm, she read envy in the glances of her girl friends.

The four *bons amis*, those happy-go-lucky young academicians, had become the lions of the season. They were the centre of a great deal of gayety, — picnics and soirées at summer villas.

Such an autumn as that, Helga had never

before seen. Nobody remembered having plucked roses and dahlias as late as they did that year. The fiord glittered in the sunshine, under a cloudless sky; the distant islands seemed surprisingly near through that limpid air; the high mountains stood steely hard and blue. Everything had become delightful. Helga fluttered from one enjoyment to another, half in love with Jens Birk.

She could not deny that he was very dashing, perhaps a little too forward; but interesting, nevertheless.

For all that, Lyder had lost none of his charm for her. His company aided her in her little coquetries; and, as she said to herself almost in ecstasy one night, when undressing in her cozy room after a ball at Richter's, "What pleasure, what happiness, to be a little coquettish!" Then, as an afterthought, "Karen Schlütter said after a waltz with Lyder, in her silly, gushing way, 'He is *so* sweet, Helga.' True, very true; but Karen could have kept it to her-

self, at least not have said it so he could hear it."

Why, was she becoming jealous of her own brother?

Lyder was certainly drawing nearer to his father.

Herman van Meeren began to believe his son was one to be proud of, after all. He even condescended to speak to him about some of his business affairs. His new feelings escaped him unexpectedly one evening, when, accompanied by Lyder, he took his usual walk to "Svartedig," a tarn among high, dark mountains.

After that, he had trusted Lyder with some of his minor bank transactions, and under the influence of his son's youthful companionship had joined one of the young people's picnics, where he astonished everybody by being extremely jovial.

Herr van Meeren looked like a well-kept ledger, written in the most exact handwriting and scrupulously clean; you could hardly imagine him unbending, and indeed

he himself apparently thought he had gone too far and made himself laughable, for soon afterwards he withdrew still more into his lonely life with its unexpressed thoughts.

"Poor papa," said Helga, laughing, "he tried to be jolly, but gave it up in despair. Poor papa!"

And who knows if he had not tried to make a change, — if he had not, perhaps for the hundredth time, tried to smooth away that which kept his wife at such a great distance from him, — now that Lyder had returned and was giving them both so much satisfaction? — Ah, if only she would forgive and forget!

But Herr van Meeren did not receive what he hoped for; the past was not forgotten.

The reaction from this summer of sunshine was agreeable to none. Herr van Meeren complained of hard times and an increasing unrest in business circles. He visited the club more frequently; when at home, he was often irritable towards the

young people, though invariably polite to his wife. The companion he had lost in her, he found little by little in Helga.

Almost every evening he and his daughter walked together. Not much was said between them; still they enjoyed each other's silent companionship. Herr van Meeren would watch Helga as she strolled off by some side-path, picking autumn leaves and belated flowers, and wait for her, patiently leaning on his ivory-headed cane, until she returned; then just as quietly they went on their way to the tarns.

Once arrived there, they would seat themselves on a bench from which they overlooked the dark water. The mountains rose in great threatening masses; but here in the peaceful autumnal evening Herr van Meeren forgot his troubles, here he rested.

After a while, they would walk slowly home, greeting those whom they met on their way, peasants for the most part, returning from town with large empty wooden milk vessels strapped to their backs, and

sometimes smaller ones in either arm; all patiently plodding their way to the small rocky farms far back among the mountains.

Lyder had now returned to the university to carry on his studies for the second examination. He went leaving a little girl behind, who did not know certainly whether she was quite engaged to him or not.

Helga too longed for him. She missed him at the balls and soirées; she missed him especially at home, now the evenings were growing so very long. She had gotten over her possible fancy for Jens Birk; he was not the kind of man she could love. There was nothing in his mental self to attract her. She had grown tired of his bold witticisms. She was becoming disgusted with society itself, — with the foppish, empty-headed young men who surrounded her; with the silly, gushing girls, lacking any high or noble interests.

And the silent friendship between her and her father grew stronger day by day.

She began to have a vague feeling that

there was something unspoken which oppressed her father; that he wanted to open his heart to her, but could not.

Sometimes, alone in her room, Helga would ask herself why she had not put her arm about him and caressed him? Surely that something would then have melted away; surely he would not have resented such caresses. Perhaps, after all, *that* was what he was longing for, — more love, more caresses. It did not enter her mind that there was one as near, yes, nearer than she, to give both to him.

" Mamma is so refined, so well-bred, of such an old aristocratic family. Mamma is so beautiful, so noble, so reserved, so above all others." Such was Helga's impression of her mother.

She made up her mind that if it was caresses her father wanted, she would give them to him.

But the result was the same, — that something came always between them. And still they knew they loved each other.

Winter had come.

One evening as father and daughter stood overlooking the tarns, watching the high snow-covered mountains dip their glowing crests in the mirroring water, Herr van Meeren took Helga's hand and held it securely. She could not remember his ever having done so before, not since she was very small. He spoke to her of the greatness of nature, its wonderful changing moods, so impressive to the human mind if one but opened his soul to its influence.

There came something almost happy into his gray, expressive eyes, as he glanced at her and again looked out over the tarns, settling back to his own silent thoughts.

Why did she not at that time return the pressure of his hand? Why did she let it slowly glide away from her? She blamed herself over and over; yet she could not have done otherwise, for that something had been there standing between them. She could only nod. Did he read in her eyes what she felt?

She commenced to sing Grieg's "Cradle Song." It blended well with the winter evening's melancholy freshness, and with the snow-covered mountains in the fading light.

And Herr van Meeren sat longer than usual, for he listened to Helga's singing. She put her whole soul into the melody; the tears came to her eyes.

She had a voice of no great power, but delightfully soft in all its cadences, so homelike, so well suited to the romances of the Norse composers. When she sang at home, Herr van Meeren invariably put aside the newspaper and listened, but never before had she seemed to him to sing so charmingly as on that evening.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" he said, as if to himself, when she had finished.

"Happy will be the one who shares his home with *her*," he thought; and involuntarily the young men of their acquaintance passed in review before his inner eye. There was not one he did not discard, — empty-

headed, arrogant, most of them returning from a few years abroad with a demeanour as if they had conquered a world, but who, if left to their own resources, would sink far below recognition in the whirling stream of human competition.

Then his thoughts dropped back to his business.

II

SPRING brought Lyder back again from the university.

He had written home that he had lost interest in his studies, that he believed he would make a better merchant than lawyer, and that if his father would give him a position in the office, he would work satisfactorily, and perhaps some day become almost as good a merchant as his successful forefathers.

Herman van Meeren & Son, thought Lyder, and later on, Lyder van Meeren.

He wrote both forms several times on a slip of paper, but wisely not in the letter. Yes, it sounded and looked well; he practised it over and over again, — Herman van Meeren & Son, with a great flourish below it.

Herr van Meeren felt somewhat disappointed at first. He would rather have seen his son in some secure government position. Trade was by no means as profitable as it

used to be. The lower classes were getting better schooled, more independent, — all of which made competition greater.

With the worst apprehensions for the future, Herr van Meeren saw the steady onward march of the middle class into social as well as mercantile and political influence. He prophesied great calamities that would befall a people losing respect for its God-ordained rulers, where the poor, penniless wretches of society thought, yes, dared to express openly their opinion that they had the same rights as the wealthy and educated.

Herr van Meeren was a strong conservative royalist, and looked askance at the prophets of the new spirit; at these youngsters, these tailors and shoemakers, yes, even peasants and labourers, who wanted to be heard, who laughed at what they chose to call the antiquated laws of society, — laws under which the country had been prosperous for a hundred years.

And, what was worse, there were those of the educated — should he call them better

classes? — who joined in this down-cry of old institutions.

No wonder times were getting hard, that one business venture after another failed, that the old profits of his youth and of his forefathers seemed a thing of the past.

Herman van Meeren had the bulk of his capital invested in large sailing vessels which ploughed all known seas, proudly flying the Norwegian flag in distant harbours. During the fisheries, he had quite a fleet of smaller craft, schooners and fishing-smacks, at Iceland, Lofoten, and Finmarken.

But the freight rates of sailing vessels had reached low-water mark; the Iceland fisheries were not always a success, very often a total failure.

And these same men, these radicals, who had succeeded through false promises to the people in sneaking into the Storthing,— these same men had the audacity to tell the experienced merchants of that old Hanseatic city that the steady increase in the use of steamers was at the bottom of the just as

steadily declining freight rates of sailing vessels.

Herr van Meeren and the whole Board of Exchange, of which he was a member, laughed at this idea. Steamers would never pay for long distances, they said; yet the freight rates went down; the Iceland fisheries were almost a failure for several years in succession; no wonder Herr van Meeren bethought himself before he consented to his son's mercantile plans.

But it won't last, he thought; better times will soon come — they must.

It had always been so; the best times invariably succeeded the hardest.

So Lyder van Meeren was permitted to occupy a seat in his father's office, at the large, old-fashioned desk.

"Herman van Meeren & Son," whispered his imagination to him, and he practised writing it on waste paper with that artistic flourish beneath it. After a while he grew careless, and one day the senior member of the imaginary firm became accidentally

aware of several such signatures which had found their way to the waste-basket.

Herr van Meeren laughed aloud, and shook his head.

That black cloud of hard times rested thicker than ever right overhead, and at the horizon sparkled the free thoughts, — the spirit of the time, like ugly streaks of lightning; and a murmur of distant thunder, the voices of the oppressed masses, became louder day by day.

And then that bitterness in his heart, that shadow of doubt, his wife's lack of confidence in him, the cold, unforgiving, colourless way in which she looked at him and still did not see him, this beautiful, proud woman, proud of her old family, — too proud to forgive him that one sin. Could she never forget the past? Never again surround him with the warmth and sunshine in which they had lived during the first years of their marriage? "Marriage!" he exclaimed in his thoughts. "Marriage! If this is marriage, it is degrading, embittering; when one has

promised what one cannot keep, what perhaps circumstances make it *impossible* to keep, when temptation steals upon one like the thief in the night, when, intoxicated with life, one's will is gone, and the blood sweeps on with checkless rapidity through the veins."

It was long, long ago.

Now age had laid its cooling influence on his gray head. Had he felt then as he did now, never, never should it have happened! Had he not begged his wife to forgive him?

Had he not told her that he loved her? That his love for her had lost nothing of its strength, that she was the only one he had ever loved? Did she wish him to go to her in confession and beg for mercy all through life? Never! Never!

But the harmony, the warmth, the happiness, *love* which makes home a home, which makes of two, man and wife — gone! gone forever!

And that woman whose mere bodily charms had tempted him and made him tempt her, how he hated her! What a whirl

of contradictions, what a chaos of unhealed diseases, pestered the body of civilised society! Yet such it has always been, such it will always be, he told himself.

The woman had bothered him with her continual demands for money, which, when he gave it to her, she so sadly misused. And when once he had refused her more, she had carried out her threat and betrayed him to his wife.

He suspected that she still annoyed his wife with such demands, but he had not the courage to ask.

Meanwhile times grew harder.

III

THE Van Meeren mansion was built of wood, and dated back to the latter part of the eighteenth century.

It had a large veranda sunk into the centre of the façade, supported by heavy, fluted pillars with Doric capitals, reaching to the height of both storeys. The large windows, double in winter, consisted of many small panes of rather inferior glass. Back of the high stone wall having a sloping roof of blue glazed tiles, and two heavily ironed, spiked ports, lay the large terraced garden, with its century-old lindens and lilacs, its grotesque wooden statuary, and high, well-trimmed hedges; its stiff beds, with old-fashioned Dutch flowers and long rows of gooseberry and currant bushes. Scaling the mountain, back of the house, was a forest of some size, of hazel, birch, and rowan trees, with winding trails and jutting ivy-covered rocks, and a

few immense white beeches, which had stood there for centuries, since the time, indeed, when all the surrounding hills and grasslands were included in the bishop's garden.

The king's highway, broad and well kept, lined on either side with lindens, ran in front.

This summer evening the lindens were in full bloom, and the air was heavy with moist warmth and an undefinable mixture of perfumes from the fields and gardens.

A few stray clouds burned in the sunset sky.

The fiord at the foot of the hills lay smooth and unruffled, like the softest satin. Some sparrows were still quarrelling in the dense crowns of the tall trees.

Lyder was just going to open the portal and enter, when he saw a girl coming down the elevated sidewalk towards town.

He had noticed her before. She was one of the servants in a neighbouring family, presumably the Richters'.

Lyder waited to let her pass.

She was tall, well shaped, with large blue eyes in an oval, pale, dimpled face.

One would never have thought her a peasant girl, had it not been for the white embroidered kerchief tied over her head.

This was all that remained of her peasant costume except a silver filigree pin fastened at her throat in the plain black woollen dress.

She returned his look with a short, uneasy glance, and before Lyder fully comprehended what he was doing, he had let go the latch of the portal and followed her.

He walked faster than she, and as he passed her, she hurriedly looked in the opposite direction.

After a while he returned and passed her once more. When he looked at her now, she slowly withdrew her eyes.

"My God," he spoke to himself, "my God, how beautiful she is!"

And that pale face, that slender, finely formed body, haunted him for days after. She stood before him when he least ex-

pected it, — so plainly seen, so very desirable. Her fair skin, almost pale, but not dead — oh, no — in his mind he had let her smile to him with that wonderful expression of those heavily-lidded eyes. He wondered if that was the way she really smiled.

Lyder had grown tired of writing the imaginary signature of Herman van Meeren & Son. To be honest with himself, he admitted he had grown heartily tired of the whole office and the smell of dried cod and cod-liver oil.

Now summer was come, he began to feel like a bird in a cage. He longed for the large world outside, and sent a yearning thought with the ships, which, all sails set, flew off to warmer seas and countries, of richer, gayer colours, under a bluer sky.

Oh, if he could throw it all off! Out, out!

He would leave the old Adam in him behind, step out in the great world a new and freer man, with only his good qualities predominating.

Why not go to Brazil and become a planter?

Then he dreamed of a large hacienda, and of a house with broad verandas in a tropical garden, and of black-eyed Spanish women. He would keep many slaves to whom he would be very kind.

He dreamed of a new generation of Van Meerens, still more powerful, more aristocratic, more renowned, than the old family in that ancient Hanseatic town.

Lyder van Meeren — the trunk of that new tree extending its branches in time all over the civilised world — a second Rothschild!

Ah, and the fragrance on board those vessels coming home from the tropical countries, — the fragrance of spices!

The sunburned sailors, the strange trinkets which he imagined must have been bought from some fair southern maiden! Lyder van Meeren had barely reached twenty.

But hiding all this, when he least expected

it, stood that pale, oval face with the heavily-lidded blue eyes smiling at him.

One day that pale, dimpled face really smiled upon Lyder — not just as in his dreams of her, more temptingly even, showing a row of perfect white teeth.

He made up his mind that he must speak to her. They smiled at each other now whenever they met; but he could never muster courage enough, in fact, there had never been an opportunity, to speak; there was always some one near, who might see and report, and that — why, that would never do. But in his thoughts he had already embraced her and whispered to her what he ought not, though he could not feel sure that she would have responded.

Herr van Meeren kept his son under close surveillance. He allowed him no official liberties which he would not have given as well to any of his clerks. He insisted upon Lyder's being at the office on time, morning and afternoon. Lyder was punctual for a while, then he com-

menced to lag; and Herr van Meeren went so far once as to reprimand his son in the presence of his clerks.

Lyder, pallid with anger, looked defiantly at his father, but did not answer. Later on he complained to his fond mother, who in her haughty way asked her husband if such a thing could be possible.

Herr van Meeren laid aside the paper he was trying to read.

He came near giving a sharp answer, but bethought himself.

"Madame," he said politely, "I demand order in my office; I do not want my own son to set a poor example; besides—"

But Fru van Meeren had left the room.

When liberated from the office, Lyder generally went straight home.

He and Helga worked in the garden after supper, where they planted and watered and sang together. They cut and dug trails in the forest, finding there shady nooks and cool grottoes under the overhanging cliffs, which formerly had been hidden be-

hind the dense undergrowth of ferns and bushes.

When thus occupied, they were children again. These peaceful groves became their fairyland, where the din of the city near by had lost its nervous restlessness, and the rumble of heavily-loaded carts over the rough cobble-stones came wafted to them in faint murmurs.

Outside was the world, the busy, restless world, with its incessant strife, with its hopes and its disappointments, its pains and its fleeting pleasures; inside, the music of nature, the fragrance of flowers.

Now for the first time did they fully understand each other, and comprehend how much they had in common. Helga had never sung so beautifully, Lyder never felt so happy, so liberated from the restlessness in him, as when during the long limpid summer nights of their northland they gave themselves into the care of Mother Nature.

But, for all this, the pale, dimpled face, framed by the snow-white kerchief, the heavy

blue eyes, the slender body in the tightly-fitting, plain black dress, would never leave him. No matter how much he tried to drive them away, they stood before him when he least expected, flitting across the trails, greeting him from among the leaves.

Did he love this girl?

A Van Meeren *love* a peasant!

Whence, then, her power?

She seemed omnipresent in his mind, and yet he had never spoken to her; in fact, there were times when he felt he would rather not — as if her smile was all he wanted — anything more would break the spell.

But not always were Lyder's thoughts so platonic. It was only in the forest or among the flowers, under the spell of nature. More than once had he been on the point of speaking to Helga concerning all this; but something kept him from it.

He believed himself to have made the discovery that women do not understand their sex. Out in life, he noticed women

were cruel to other women, much more so than were men. And what was this wonderful something, forbidden yet so very natural, which with but abnormal exceptions existed between the opposite sexes?

Love! love! was it love? If so, he loved, and — was it wrong? "Under restrictions," answered Christian society, "you may love."

No, Helga would not understand, Helga was a woman; and as for the other one, he did not even know her name, nor whence she came; she was a woman, and he a man, that was all he knew.

That open smile, those eyes, the slow, graceful way of walking, she could not have come from any of the narrow inland fiords, where the mountains cast their eternal shadows over the homes of the peasant. She must have come from out among the islands, where the sun laughs over broad waters, and sea-birds take their long, free flight over humming waves.

"Eh, Lyder van Meeren," thus he inter-

rupted his own thoughts, "thou art in love with a common peasant girl."

Yet why common? Surely there was nothing coarse about her.

Jens Birk, and those other *bons amis* of his, could not understand what was the matter with Lyder. He never came to the club any more; he went very little in society and seemed always in a hurry to get home. It was ridiculous for a young fellow like him to have said good-bye already to the gladness of youth.

To Lyder, this jolly circle seemed for the first time coarse. He wondered how he ever could have enjoyed their society.

Herr van Meeren now generally took his long walks alone. He saw that Helga preferred to be with Lyder, and he cared little for his son; the two did not feel at ease in each other's company.

Lyder irritated his father by his visible lack of interest in the work. The spirit of the woods, the mountains, the flowers, the lakes, and the fiord combined to make Lyder

indifferent to his work. It seemed impossible for him to be at the office at regular hours.

Herr van Meeren may have understood the reason of his son's negligence, but he simply said, "First duty, then pleasure." Of course, he failed to analyse the benefits to himself from the daily long walks which he enjoyed so much. The source of that peace which these few hours of daily contact with nature brought to his mind, he never searched for.

Soon he did not even miss Helga's company. He nodded to the peasants he met walking the king's highway. There came to be a kind of acquaintance between him and those he passed regularly on his walks, though he never spoke to one of them.

But times were growing harder; one old business house after another collapsed.

Herr van Meeren bore his burden of anxieties alone. His wife had no sympathy with him; the past was not forgotten.

He laughed scornfully when he thought

of those signatures of Herman van Meeren & Son.

"Father does not comprehend me," Lyder complained to Helga and his fond mother. And the distance between father and son grew greater and greater; they had grown to be almost strangers.

IV

THE silence of winter again lay over the Norwegian mountains and valleys. The sky was gray, the wind increased, and then the snowflakes began their merry dance, adding to the depth of that soft white carpet already laid over the slumbering earth in the far northlands.

The old, old trees in the park stood firm under their heavy burden; the hawthorn hedges looked almost a solid mass of whiteness; but the sparrows found shelter among the stunted, crooked twigs. They cuddled themselves up and longed for spring and plenty of food.

In the glittering, frost-cold nights, when the aurora flashed restlessly over the deep, starry sky; or when the moon cast the fantastic shadows of the trees upon the smooth, glittering snow-blanket, — Helga and Lyder

stood by one of the large, small-paned windows in the dining-room.

He laid his arm lightly around her, and there they stood, as often, until late, making plans for the future, confiding to each other their thoughts and longings, gaining in mutual understanding and affection.

It was Christmas.

Should they have a ball this year? Fru van Meeren felt quite ashamed that the children had been invited everywhere and as yet had done nothing in return.

Invitations to the Van Meeren ball were sent in all directions.

It was an elegant affair.

The large old-fashioned rooms, with their immense, antique iron stoves, shone with light from the glittering crystal crowns and candelabra, while the air was heavy with warmth and the perfume of salted roses.

The large ball-room, grotesquely frescoed, lay on one side of the hall and the broad winding staircase. Every time the veranda door opened, the quaint hall lantern of

wrought iron, struck by the draught, growled on its hinges at all this modern gayety, remembering — the poor old thing! — the times of the first Van Meerens.

The high-backed ebony chairs, bright with golden leather, had been freed from their dust covers and shone in all their antique beauty.

The marbled floors, the tables laden with heirlooms of silver and porcelain, the home-made, crocheted antimacassars on the immense hair-cloth sofas, seemed a strange mixture, and told of family history and taste for almost two hundred years.

At the broad entrance of the drawing-room stood the host and hostess: Herr van Meeren aristocratic and tall of stature, with gray hair brushed into a tuft over his forehead, and high stiff collar wound around with a heavy white satin cravat, stood by the side of his beautiful wife, who was clad in a stiff black silk dress and with a sparkling diamond brooch at her throat. As they stood there together, smiling and shak-

ing hands with each new arrival, no one could have guessed the distance between them.

Helga and Lyder were busy introducing and otherwise looking after their guests. Helga was radiant that evening; she showed her happiness in every movement, and Lyder was once more one of the old *bons amis*. He had forgotten everything in the desire of making all happy.

The tall Nuremberg clock in the hall boomed drowsily, with long rests between each stroke; it belonged to the old, easy-going time.

"I can't say another word until that old thing stops," said Karen Schlütter, affectedly. She was coquetting with Jens Birk. "It really makes me nervous; you don't know whether it is through or not — there, now."

But that clock could have told many stories of the good old days, the time of the earlier Van Meerens, who ages ago emigrated from some Dutch Hanseatic city, and who had been so successful in their adopted

country. Perhaps they were standing there in the corners, unseen, in their powdered perukes, by the side of their gentle dames, watching disdainfully the generations which had grown up after them.

Yet Herr van Meeren was as gallant as a courtier.

He, too, had forgotten his troubles for a little while, — his ships, his calculations, the hard times, and his past; drowned it all in this laughter and happiness around him, — this atmosphere of youth, thoughtlessness, and old wines.

But the dark, familiar thoughts came to him once, even in all this light. He hurled them away and looked at his wife, so well preserved, so beautiful, in her flushed excitement. It was long, long ago — it seemed to him an eternity — and on just such an evening as this, in the intoxicating whirl of society, at her father's home, that they had joined hands for life.

Herr van Meeren did not sleep that night. For hours after his guests had left, he wan-

dered back and forth through the glaring rooms, imagining all the past. Outside, the snow was falling listlessly, covering up everything.

Oh, if she only loved him! he thought.

The winter wound up with a terrible storm all along the coast. It cut heavily into Van Meeren's fishing fleet; but the vessels were all insured, and everybody expected better times with the advent of spring.

Herr van Meeren felt quite sure there would be a change, if not — well, some more of the old business houses in the large cities would collapse — that was all.

V

SPRING came, and very suddenly. It commenced to blow with a warm air from the south.

The rain poured down, the snow melted, and the water flowed in torrents towards the sea.

Small brooks became muddy rivers; and the frozen cascades, freed from their fetters, succeeded, with their deep boom of falling water, in making a strong impression upon expectant Nature.

What a busy time they had, all the little roots in the soft, black mould up in the sheltered cracks, and among the rocks on the southern slopes!

They stretched themselves after the long winter sleep, and soon there appeared tiny round leaves. One day Helga brought in a buttercup.

The air became dense and warm.

The steam rose from the meadows and marshes, dark spots became visible in the snow masses of the high mountains; and the islands, out over the soft, gray sea, were almost hidden behind all that drifting moisture.

The sparrows were quarrelling and making plans for their weddings.

The bird-cherry stood drooping under its large burden of flowers, and the cuckoo laughed in the thickets.

"Beautiful spring," said Helga, "oh, how beautiful!" and she sang.

One Sunday morning Lyder was on his way up to the mountains and tarns, following the king's highway.

He had started early, not caring to meet any one.

Soon he reached the heights, where he could look over the stone walls and terraces of the parks towards the fiord and islands. There rested a Sunday expression over all, quiet, almost solemn.

Lyder hurried on with long steps. He thought of the tall eagle-ferns, of the heather, and the cry of waterbirds on the marshes and lakes. He longed for it all and for that loneliness amid which he never felt lonesome.

And after Sunday must needs come the invariable Monday. That meant back again to the office, keeping books, while all this happy life of summer was going on among the mountains.

What kind of life was he leading, anyhow? Why would not his father let him have his wish, to live out here in the only kind of place in which he could be happy?

He had written to his father, not being able to summon courage to speak, and had asked that he would buy him a farm, eloquently pleading that indoor work was unsuited to him, telling how he yearned to dig in the soil, plant and harvest; how gladly he would be poor, if he might live out in the blessed country, where all that was best in him helped him to conquer his lower desires,

where he felt honest and free. "I would much rather be poor," ended the letter, — "poor and a man, — than rich and a brute."

For four long days he awaited an answer. Coming home from the exchange, the fourth day, his father said in a strange, cold way, —

"I received a letter from you the other day." Then followed a painful silence. After a while, "There is not dry bread in farming; you really astonish me, my son, with your inconsistency." He shook his head, and added, "Such dreams of a hut and a heart are too impracticable for our time. I most sincerely wish you would settle down to energetic work in your present position in which there are thousands who would envy you."

That had been the end of it, — Lyder made no reply, and his father never alluded to the matter again.

Lyder turned off from the king's highway, and entered an almost abandoned road, scaling some birch-covered hills. It was

lined on both sides by stone fences, and deeply shaded by large rowan-trees, under which the clear water oozed from the wet hillsides, faintly gurgling along the gravelly waggon-ruts. This road was a short cut to the tarns.

The thrushes sang in the hazel thickets. Lyder longed for a sight of that pale peasant girl. He felt what happiness it would be to saunter alone with her in this fragrant air, with this jubilant summer all around them. Then the thought oppressed him, he became sad.

Was he in love with her, really in love? Well, why should he not be?

Was she not as good as many of those fine ladies, who, with no more right than she, expected so much of life?

Eh, but was she not a peasant, lacking in education, her language crude, her manners — ah, if it came to manners there was something almost queenly about hers, — simple and proud. Surely there was nothing coarse or bold in her smile.

If he might meet her in the heather, among the wild mountains, on that day! She seemed to belong so closely to it all, to be the soprano in that concert of summer voices.

He had now reached the crest of the hills. Far below lay the tarns, nestling among the mountains.

Down there, just where the road turned to follow along the shore, at the top of a low knoll, somebody was sitting, — a woman whose form stood out clearly against the dark water.

Lyder stopped abruptly.

"Silly fool!" he spoke to himself, "how could she be there? What would she do out of town so early on a Sunday morning? As if there were not a thousand lasses and more wearing white kerchiefs!"

Nevertheless Lyder hurried on.

A grove of hazels hid the tarns from view; then again they appeared, again were lost.

He could not sing, as he was wont to do when walking quickly downhill.

"If it should be she, after all," he sighed.

As the road swept around some great lichen-covered rocks, he suddenly found himself closer to the woman than he had expected to be.

She looked around, hearing him slide over the rocks, then arose and walked slowly, following the road by the shore.

Lyder felt stunned. Should he follow her? For all his longings, he had scarcely been prepared for this. He halted a moment, then hastened after her.

"Good-morning," he said in a low voice as he overtook her.

She glanced out over the tarns. He thought she was laughing.

"Where are you going so early this morning?" he asked in a friendly tone.

She looked at him scrutinisingly, but did not answer.

Lyder was beginning to feel ashamed of himself, yet gathered courage for one more effort.

"Your parents do not live up here among

the mountains, do they?" he said kindly, without looking at her.

"No, but my sister does."

"I did not know you had a sister. What is her name?"

"Marit Hakonsdatter."

"That is a nice name; and yours?"

"Mine? Guri."

"Guri Hakonsdatter," he said, and smiled. It fitted her well, that name.

"So you are going to see your sister, are you? She is married, is she?"

Guri laughed, as if greatly amused.

"No, she is n't married, sure; she is the cook at Schlütter's, at the head of the lake. They moved up there a few weeks ago for the summer, and I have not seen Marit since then. But monsieur would better walk on. I see city folks coming," she added with evident anxiety, stopping as if to let him pass.

Lyder understood it would not appear well for him to be seen in company with a peasant girl. And he recognised the Schlütter turnout in the distance.

If Karen Schlütter was in the carriage with her sweet mamma, it would indeed be food for the hungry!

"I will wait for you by the old stone bridge," he said hurriedly.

She gave him a short, half-reproachful glance and lowered her eyes, but made no answer.

"Even if they did chance to see me speak to her," he thought, "they might easily suppose I said only good-morning or something like that."

He tipped his straw hat as the Schlütters passed him. The whole family were evidently on their way to church. Karen smiled graciously at him, and he felt relieved when out of their sight.

On the pillars of the old stone bridge grew a small fern, *Asplenium trichomane.* Lyder wanted some roots for the rockery at home in the garden; he would see if they were there yet; that would make time pass more quickly. He found them in great abundance, fine and graceful. Ferns were

his favourite plants; they made him dream of the tropical islands he had read about.

It seemed to take an eternity for her to reach the bridge.

Perhaps she was afraid of him, and had returned; but, no, the white kerchief appeared above the knoll, then her head, then her whole body against the blue sky. Slowly she walked towards him, smiling as if their meeting was a matter of course. With one hand she lifted her gown to keep from touching the spongy ground. A faint flush had come into her cheeks; she raised her head and scanned the upper tarn, scintillating in the broad sunlight at the foot of the mountains whose snowy crests rose above the summer verdure.

The air was filled with fragrance from the birches; once in a while a strong gust of air, descending from the peaks, would darken the water.

He took her hand and looked into her very soul. She did not lower her eyes; there came a sort of veil over them, and she

smiled again faintly as he pressed her hand and stammered, "Guri, thou art beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!"

She gave him no answer, but her smile intoxicated him.

He led her into the forest of alders. The tarn shone between the dark trunks of the trees below the yellow swamps on its margin. The thrushes flew screaming around their nests to protect them. A far-off boom from a rockslide silenced the song of the birds in the thickets for a few seconds, when they commenced again more jubilant than ever.

Lyder and Guri walked together slowly over the soft, moss-covered forest ground. He had taken her arm and kept it pressed close to him. Slowly, slowly, almost as in a dream, he led her along; deeper and deeper into the forest, among moss-covered boulders, over little rills clear as crystal, humming among the ferns, among the foxgloves and tall brakes; farther and farther away from the world into that soothing solitude of

nature, — Guri so beautiful, so majestic in her slow, gliding walk; smiling, ever faintly smiling.

"Guri," he whispered, "thou art beautiful, beautiful;" and he laid his arm around her waist, leading her always farther, farther into the forest.

The day had become warm.

The sunlight glittered on the small waves of the tarn, dazzling Guri's eyes as she looked at it. The girl was walking alone in the shade of the alders.

She hurried on, suddenly stopping by the corner of a stone wall which surrounded the garden of the Schlütter summer residence. She looked over the back yard and kitchen garden for Marit.

A little rill crossed the road from under the ferns and rocks. Guri bent down, moistened her handkerchief, and held it over her burning face. Could she not get around that corner and enter the gate? Something held her, — was she afraid of

her own sister? She wished to return, but could not do that either. She leaned her elbow on the rock fence, for a faintness was coming over her. But she shook her head and laughed a strange laughter, that scared her.

"My God, my God!" she whispered.

Somebody opened the door and slipped out into the yard, singing. It was Marit. If Guri only could be sure her sister was alone, she would hurry to meet her before she went in again, or — call her.

"Marit!" she tried to call, but it barely passed her lips. She succeeded better with a second effort.

Marit looked around, shading her eyes.

Guri called once more, and Marit, turning towards the gate, walked out into the highway where Guri was standing.

"What on earth is the matter with *you?*" she said, reaching out her hand.

"Oh, nothing," said Guri, trying to answer lightly.

"Why don't you come in?"

"Oh, you 'd better come out; let us go up on the hillside, where we can be alone, darling."

Marit gazed at her in astonishment. Some one called from within, "Marit."

"I will stay here till you return; or no — I will go up on the big rock yonder and wait for you," said Guri.

She walked on slowly and seated herself in the shade of the rocks.

Below lay the marshes interspersed with groves of stunted alders. The tarn looked darkly deep. A string of ducks came flying low over it from out of the distance, alighting with a splash in the middle. Once in a while a trout, which had jumped for a fly, left faint, waning circles of wavelets. The shades of the rugged peaks fell blue upon the snow in their crevices. And what a singing of migratory birds! What a love-feast among them! Then such a warm, sleepy air, so fragrance-laden; such wafts of soft wind rising across the waters, dying away in the heather!

Guri stretched herself on the moss. She lay on her side with one arm under her head, looking out over the lakes, but seeing nothing.

What would the kind old pastor at Vik have said? Had he not told her to keep to the Lord? Had he not that evening, before she boarded the steamer, knelt with her alone in his quiet study and prayed to God for her that she would remain pure and good in the great city, amid its many temptations? Then he had laid his hand on her head, — "God bless you, my child," said he. The poor old vicar! how she loved him.

Her thoughts wandered back to a terrible winter long ago, when her father went away, never to return, when her mother was so sick, and all the children were hungry; when old grandmother Guri was carried away by the avalanche; the winter when her mother cried through all the long, gray days, and after dark cried louder and wilder, thinking the children asleep, begging God for Hakon, her husband.

How clearly it all stood before Guri now, though she was so very little at the time! Among the grayness and darkness of that winter, which seemed the beginning of her life, stood the vicar with his kind, loving face. He took her to his home and brought her up among his own children till she grew old enough to do housework.

She longed for the broad fiord, where it entered from the ocean; for the islands and for seabirds, whose nests she used to rob. She longed for the vicar; she wanted to go to him that he might pray for her after she should have told him all.

Would he turn her away? "The city with its temptations," he had said. He knew it all, the dear old vicar; he would understand her, forgive her, help her.

But Lyder van Meeren, young, a gentleman, the son of a rich family, how she loved him!

The fine perfume of his costly clothes, yes, and his nearness, had taken her senses away. He was kind and gentle, too. He

had spoken to her softly, lovingly: "Little Guri, don't, don't cry; I love you, love you." My God, if only she dared love *him*, dared proclaim it to all the world!

He would not be dishonourable, Lyder van Meeren. When he said, "Little Guri," he said it as if he truly loved her.

The thought overpowered her, and she wept. She was weeping still when Marit came. Seating herself close to Guri, the latter scolded, teased, begged, till at last she knew it all.

A long silence followed.

The more Marit thought of it, the harder grew the expression of her face. She cursed these rich men who sought only pleasure and left behind them only sorrow. She ground her teeth at the thought. How she would like to see *them* poor, see *them* humble as those who have to serve. Only a lass — was not that what they said? And what did they care if they took away the peace and happiness of that poor lass forever?

But as Marit's hatred for Lyder van Meeren

and his sort increased, so did her love for her sister become tenderer and tenderer.

Marit was the younger, a coarse-looking girl, with reddish hair and colourless eyes. She had a deep, masculine voice, and her nature was an unusual mingling of high temper with reserve.

"God punish him for it!" she said to herself; "God punish him for it! but," aloud, "don't you cry, dear, don't."

Evening came with reddening peaks and silence, with burning clouds after sunset, with the fragrance of moisture from the moorlands.

An impromptu party of young folk had arrived at the villa.

There was jolly laughter and singing among the rowan-trees and the birches. Coloured lamps hung under the leafy vaults by the shore, and their reflections quivered on the dark water.

The summer night seemed filled with love and thoughtless happiness. Gay speeches

and laughter rang out from around the punch table in the garden hall, and in a secluded arbour where, some one had forgotten to light the coloured lamps, whispers fell lightly.

Along the shore walked Guri.

She moved slowly, keeping well in under the trees, where she could not be seen, once in a while stopping to lean against a trunk and listen for a voice she knew; wondering if Lyder van Meeren was among those happy youths, listening for his laugh among the laughter, but in vain.

It made her happy to think he was not there.

She continually heard the sweet words he had spoken to her, growing more and more happy, more sure that she wished to meet him again. She had forgotten the old vicar with his silvery hair, his deep vibrating voice, his fatherly love and his warning, — "the large city with its many temptations." She had forgotten everything but love; the simple lass loved Lyder, and she made up her mind to do many things for his sake.

When she reached the hazel forest on the heights, she commenced to sing. It was a song her mother had taught her, — a melody softly rocking like a boat on a summer sea, a fisherman's song with a pleasing melancholy in its gayety. And Guri, as lasses are wont to do, smacked her lips when she was through singing.

How happy she was!

VI

LYDER sat at his desk looking out on the harbour where the steamers were going and coming.

It was sultry in the office, the air being saturated with the odour of dried and salted fish and oil.

To some this smell meant life, business transactions, and prosperity, — the odorous wealth of the sea stored in the ancient warehouse of the old Hanseates.

The long blue-painted shelves along the walls were filled with yarn and nets and tarred ropes, — goods to be traded for what the fishermen brought every summer from their homes in the far northlands.

Every summer they came with their large open hulks loaded high up to the masts with stacks of dried fish.

They came speeding in the fiord, these high-prowed, square-sailed crafts resembling

the vikings' dragons of old. They came from their gray northern seas, and had on board a race of hardened men accustomed to look death in the eye, men who were always poor, and who in their slow, singing way of speech, earnest expression of features, and the singular melancholy of their mirth, seemed to have been shaped both bodily and mentally in conformity with their surroundings.

The dreary, stormy winters, the desolate marshes and barren hills of their home-land and islands had stamped them.

They were men whose eyes could sparkle like the lightning of a storm-night on the sea. They were men of deep emotions, hailing from a land where death and sorrow so often wailed over the waters in the dark storm-nights; men looked down upon because they were not understood.

Tied up in debt to the old business houses of the city, suffering from the uncertainty of their ocean harvest and steadily increasing indebtedness, debt-slaves to the end of their

lives, they sank by the score into early graves under a capsized boat on a frightful sea, or died from winter hardships while gathering their precious harvest.

They looked awkward and slow, often sullen, as they entered the office in a long row, bringing with them the odour of wet clothes and dried fish. Lazy and without energy they seemed to those who had not lived among them and seen them at work, riding the wild sea in their open boats under the bleak northern winter sky. Even the street *gamins* made fun of them, imitating their singing mode of speech.

After a short stay in the city, they hoisted their large, tanned sails, and before a southerly breeze, perhaps in a pouring rain, glided out from the fiord towards their northern homes to renew their battle for existence with the elements.

Old Herr van Meeren had no longer any occasion to feel dissatisfied with his son. Lyder was the first in the office and the last to leave it. He did his very best to

please his father, and Herr van Meeren hoped that at last his son had come to his senses, become aware of his duties.

However, Lyder's interest in his father's business was not more than skin deep. He hated as much as ever to sit shut up, scribbling letters, keeping books, and, as he said to himself, helping to rob as best he could. But since the day he had first spoken to Guri, a feeling of responsibility had come home to him. He wished to please his father, so that some day — it must come soon — he might go to him with more confidence and ask for his liberty. He would ask for a part of his inheritance, take Guri, and go out in the world, — far off to the North American coast of the Pacific ocean. There in that new fruit and wine garden on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, he would buy a small home, cultivate the soil, live an ideal life, the master of himself, and her master too, — for he expected her to be obedient! Was not he a Van Meeren, while she? — But Guri was beautiful, lovable; and

what she lacked in education and perhaps in manners he would soon teach her.

There *were* times when he doubted whether, on account of this difference in social position, he should be happy with Guri Hakonsdatter as his wife.

It ought not to be so — such a difference ought not to exist; something was wrong, very wrong, in society. Yet the Bible said, "The poor ye have always with you."

Besides, in a discussion going on between Jens Birk and his friends on one side, and Hans Gram, the editor of "The Liberal Press," on the other, many things were very convincing. Jens Birk had certainly the stronger arguments, both from the Bible and history; he used them forcibly, too. Hans Gram's arguments for equal rights and opportunities seemed rather loose-jointed; in fact, as Jens Birk said, they were impracticable. All could not be masters; some had the gifts for making money, others had not; and as money was the real distributor of advantages and opportunities,

how could the two classes then ever become equal?

Hans Gram's answer — that money was the accursed ruler of Christian society, and that humanity never would become civilised so long as money existed — brought forth loud laughter. He was a radical with socialistic tendencies, they said; perhaps a full-fledged Socialist — think of it — *Socialist!* Murder and anarchy!

Yes, Lyder had begun to *think*. This affair with Guri had started him. Experience is a wonderful teacher, he thought.

His desire to live close to the soil was inherent in him. Only there did he feel happy and sure of himself.

"I love her," he said to himself; and still — there was something, something —

Of course he could never marry her in his present surroundings. What a scandal would not that be! "There goes the Van Meeren who married a peasant girl," people would say when he passed them on the streets.

At last came the day when Lyder could endure no longer.

Lately, of evenings, when occupied in the flower garden and the park, his conversation with Helga had by degrees glided into more practical, more earnest channels.

They had been children long enough. Now they began to exchange opinions, each one defending hotly his or her side of the question.

Helga doubted whether it was right for them to shut themselves up away from those who were struggling out in the world.

"What right have we to enjoy ourselves this way, while out yonder goes on the battle for existence?"

"Well," answered Lyder, musingly, "I doubt whether that battle you speak of, where those who fall in the throng are stepped upon by those who follow, where the few live in luxury and the many suffer want, is anything to desire. I would rather leave it all if I could, Helga. I want to go where I can live undisturbed, close to nature,

cultivate the soil, and keep as far away as possible from that strife where there is no mercy."

He saw it all plainly before him, — to become a man, he must be put where he had absolute need of all his faculties, where he should stand dependent on no one but himself. Oh, but what was there in him to fit him for the world's struggle, he who had love for the flowers, for nature, he who admired art and music and who could dream for hours at the piano? And the thought saddened him; but the murmur of industry outside the tall hawthorn hedges would not leave him alone any longer. He commenced to speak to Helga about duty. He told her he hated to struggle; he longed to live in peace, work for himself, raise his bread from the soil. All other struggles, wherein one had to push in the throng of humanity, use one's nails and scratch, lie, break others down in order to succeed oneself, — he hated the very thought of it.

But ill suited as he was to struggle, how

dared he take Guri with him! Did he love her enough to live with her always? What was that something which at times seemed to push her away from him even in his thoughts of her?

He had met her often since the first time.

They had wandered together in the loneliness among the mountains, by the lakes and in the forest, up on the high peaks, where they felt free.

And the more he saw of her, the more charmed he felt.

"My God," he sighed — "she is not like other peasant girls — she is devoid of all coarseness."

And still — that something! He made up his mind that he must leave soon and without her — work out in the world first with the thought of making a home for her to encourage him; then when he had built the home, send for her.

But what would become of her while he was away? It might take a year, perhaps two, before he could return. Would the

something grow stronger? Too strong for him, so that she never could come? What would become of her *then?*

With horror he thought of his old comrades, if she should fall into their clutches!

He must protect her; but how?

Speak to Helga? Tell her all, beg her to make a sister of Guri until he was able to send for her? Insanity! How could Helga van Meeren and a peasant lass become sisters? What would Helga's warm heart and all her love for him amount to under that glaring eye of so-called Christian, society?

A servant girl, a peasant, daughter of a widow with many children, supported by the district, living away out on a naked island by the open sea, and — Miss van Meeren!

When he took Guri into consideration, he almost gave up his determination of speaking to his father that evening. It would be hard to leave her, and even if he warned her, there was still great danger. He felt convinced that should she fall into the hands of others, they would leave her a wreck by the

roadside, — a human wreck tossed on the billows of Christian indignation, thrown against the cliff of Christian condemnation, hopelessly lost.

Was not the world full of such examples?

Strange, he thought, — and it had never stood so clearly before him as then, — strange what a great difference there is between Christ and those who call themselves His followers. Was that the reason why his father never went to church? Was he, despite all his conservative ideas, under the influence of the liberal school of religious thought? Or was he simply ungodly?

Then came to Lyder's mind something which had happened while he was yet a child, something he had then not understood.

One day, being very busy talking to himself, he was startled to hear a clear voice behind him say, —

"How-de-do, Lyder?"

Turning, he saw a girl of about his own age smiling at him. He had never seen her before, and it astonished him that she should

thus call him by name. He stood and gaped at her.

"Don't you know me?" she asked.

Lyder shook his head.

"I am your sister." She took his hand confidingly. "Your papa is my papa too, but your mother isn't my mother."

Lyder was so dazed that he could find no words; but he did not fear her, for she spoke kindly, and later on picked nuts for him, being a much better climber than he.

She was dressed in the plain garb of a working-man's child, with no shoes on her feet and a ragged dress.

They played together quite awhile. He liked her very much, for she did just as he wished.

After she had left him and run halfway down the hillside, she turned and called back, —

"Don't tell your mamma; if you do, she 'll fix it so that I never can come back and play with you. Don't you tell."

As he now recalled this incident it seemed

to him that there was something terrible in the way she said these words.

He hurried home and told his mother, who clasped him in her arms and laughed,—such a strange, forced laughter; he could still hear it ringing in his ears.

But that little girl never came back to play with him.

Lyder had walked as far up the hillside as the rowan-trees, where the road was lined on both sides by high stone fences.

Here grew his favoured fern, the *Asplenium trichomane.*

The water, oozing out among the rocks higher up on the hillside, trickled clear as crystal over the pebbles in the middle of the old washed road.

"The rowan-berries are sour," said the fox.

Was that the reason why the great busy world seemed so little in sympathy with him? Was he like the fox, calling the berries sour because he could not reach them?

Coming to the conclusion that the world,

not himself, was blamable, he felt happier. Truly, those on whom Nature bestows her noblest gifts are the very ones whom social laws prevent from enjoying these gifts. The greedy, the merciless, the unscrupulous, the most ardent worshippers of Mammon, — it is often they upon whom society bestows most lavishly the means of enjoyment, regardless of the fact that the recipients of these benefactions are quite unable to comprehend the value or the nature of the pleasures which they share.

"Things are divided strangely in civilised society," thought Lyder.

Yet why feel anxious? The whole world lay open to a Van Meeren. And had he not long ago made up his mind that if ever he should become a man, he must be left to his own resources?

The more he thought of it, the more certain he became that this conclusion was right, immovably so.

Then the question faced him again; it would ever return, — how about Guri?

"They are sour," said the fox; "the rowan-berries are sour — sour — sour —"

But there was his father far ahead on the road, walking slowly toward the tarns. Lyder soon caught up with him.

Herr van Meeren was in deep thought. He was thinking of his first ship, the one he had built shortly after taking his father's business. He called her "Lina," after his young wife. She was the largest vessel built in Bergen up to that day. How proud and beautiful had she looked as she lay at anchor in the stream outside the Van Meeren warehouse!

Below her gunwale were large white-painted imitation port-holes. These served both as ornaments and as a scarecrow against sea-robbers. They made her look like a man-of-war, and indeed there were pirates enough in those times both in the south Mediterranean and the Malayan Archipelago.

But the "Lina" foundered on her first trip to China, and he then built "Bergen." Others followed in close succession; at last

came the beautiful full rigger "Berent van Meeren," named for his father. She was the most beautiful ship that ever had entered the harbour of Bergen, built in Genoa of Italian oak. But she had never paid interest on the capital. The good times had persisted in staying away, and those northern fishermen and the country merchants were getting more independent; the coasting steamers were searching every harbour for their goods; the city merchants undersold and overbid one another; business transactions and methods which in the good old times would have been looked down upon as dishonourable were now called simply "business."

What would it all come to?

In the Storthing the republicans, men with insane modern ideas, were getting in the majority, and passed laws by which ignorant working-men would soon have as much to say in political and social matters as he himself. Ah, the times! the times! Herr van Meeren shook his head.

His large inherited fortune, to which in earlier days he had added considerably, was dwindling away at an alarming speed.

Lyder startled his father as he caught up with him, so suddenly did he bring him out of his dark thoughts.

Lyder had pleased him lately.

Herr van Meeren looked sallow and worried; his hair had turned almost white. There was a faint vibration in his voice as he said, —

"Is that you, Lyder?"

Stopping, he leaned one arm on the stone fence, looking over the terraced gardens across the fiord towards Lövstaken, huge and dark and naked.

The sun had set. The wind was raw as it fell from among the mountains; something bleak rested over everything. Summer had surely vanished.

The swallows were gathering in large flocks, preparatory to their departure.

There was a strange sense of unrest over nature.

The feeling of distance, which had grown so strong between father and son, kept them silent for a while, though each wished to speak.

At last Lyder remarked that "Viking," the steamer belonging to Berentz & Son, had run ashore outside the mouth of the fiord, though they thought she could be saved if the sea kept calm.

"But I don't think it will," said Herr van Meeren; "there is a change in the weather to-night."

"Well, they have full insurance both on her and the cargo."

"Of course, of course."

"And I presume they could stand it anyhow," added Lyder, lightly.

Herr van Meeren looked earnestly at his son.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked.

Lyder nodded, looking rather foolish. He answered low, —

"I thought so."

"Yes, but nowadays one is constantly

getting surprises in such matters, my son," Herr van Meeren said in an earnest tone.

"But Berentz & Son are rich; are they not, father?"

"They were and probably are, and so was Herman van Meeren once; but he is so no longer, my son. I have wanted to tell you this for some time, to tell you that you must not depend upon me for your future. It is hard for me to say it, but of my fortune there is nothing left, — *nothing*."

He extended his two empty hands, then added in a more composed voice, —

"If I were you, Lyder, I would go out in the world. Here at home people are stepping on one another; I would go out in the world, and try to do better than your father has done."

Lyder lowered his eyes; then suddenly he grasped his father's hand.

"Yes, yes," he stammered, "let — let me go; I — I want to, father — just what I was going to speak to you about to-night."

It was the first time in years that father and son had been so friendly.

Herr van Meeren put his arm into his son's, and slowly they walked along together.

The air was restless. The wind blew from all directions and whirled the faded leaves.

" Do not tell your mother about my financial condition; she will not understand, so we had better not bother her with it. Besides, so long as my credit lasts, and there is no danger of sustaining losses to anybody if I should fail, I will keep right at work, trying to mend things. If times get better soon, I shall perhaps be able to straighten out matters. Why, then, give her unnecessary anxieties? Better not bother her with it."

They had seated themselves on the bench. At the foot of the hill lay the tarns. The mountains looked hard and unsympathetic in the twilight.

In thought, Lyder followed the road along the shore, where he had spoken to Guri the first time; he followed it with his eyes to the

place where they had turned into the forest among the moss-covered rocks. His courage fell. He had many plans for his future that he would have gladly confided to his father, now it had come to the turning point, yet, walking homewards, he accepted those of his companion without a single objection, though it must be admitted that many of Herr van Meeren's good counsels passed through Lyder's head unheeded.

One thought now superseded all others: Guri, — what would become of her now that he was no longer backed by the riches of the Van Meerens?

Accursed money! It is true, after all, it rules everything. Lyder clinched his fist, but he carefully kept his fists in his pockets.

If only he dared tell his father! Why should he not dare? Why not simply go to him with it all, as a son should go to his father, ask his aid, his counsels, his encouragement to do his duty, — the duty he so gladly would do, though now the obstacles seemed insurmountable?

And still — if it were so, as he now believed, — if that little girl had told him the truth years ago, — if — if — ah, but they were too far apart; between him and his father there was something insurmountable. Different inclinations, different objects in life, so many mutual misunderstandings; strife, strife for supremacy in life, — what was it all? It was *all* between them; and yet he began to think that perhaps his father was the very one to whom he could go with his troubles, the very one to understand, especially in this about Guri. He had a vague feeling that his father was a far more lovable man than he seemed to be; that indeed his heart was brimful of love for all of them; and yet that something!

They were to each other as positive and negative poles; they could never be brought together, — never.

After supper Lyder withdrew to his room to be alone with the thoughts that stormed in on him.

He did not know whether to be happy or

to give himself over to the strange grief which struggled to rise in his mind.

Slowly a great fear accompanied by a sense of loneliness crept over him; for he felt the full seriousness of the step he had taken that day. He had a presentiment of what it meant to stand alone in the world. Not until this moment had he had an idea of what that meant. No longer would his pockets be full of money; he would not be backed by the great name of the Van Meerens.

And his father's words, "Of my fortune is nothing left — nothing," commenced to hum through his head. It stood as if written on the air before his eyes. He tried to blot it out, to feel careless, thoughtless, and happy; but it constantly returned, till he became so afraid of life that he tried to lie to himself, tried to make himself believe that it was not so after all, it could not possibly be, — his father had said it simply to scare him into activity. But the thought returned to him again and again, that after this

he would have no more advantage than those clerks in his father's office he so often had pitied, looking upon them as life-long slaves. In fact, he was not so well fitted as they for the great struggle, for they had come from poor homes and struggled all their lives, they had never expected anything else; but he — my God, how poorly prepared was *he!*

The temptation assailed him to let go of it all, give himself over to a dissolute life whereby he might forget. Such a life could not last long — so much the better!

He arose and paced the floor, and his despair grew stronger as he thought of Guri.

"O God! Thou knowest I wish to do what is right by her!"

How would it be possible for him to say good-bye, when he dared promise her nothing? She would not believe him if he told her that his father was poor. Van Meeren, Van Meeren, — it was one of those gilded names which brought with its very sound a jingle of gold. Yet it was not gold she

wanted; no, it was love, love, — that was all. But gold had become stronger than love. How dared he love her when his purse was empty!

His father had told him once, that a hut and a heart were not enough.

"What have I done," he sobbed, "how did I do it? I am in love with a peasant girl. Through mutual consent we met, we loved; what wrong was there in that, what harm to any one?"

Did not the birds do the same? Ah, but there was a great difference, — they were under different laws. The happy birds in the woods had not, like civilised humanity, strayed away from the mother's home to pray to false gods; they had kept close to her and were free. Civilised man had misused the developed mind which nature had given him. Instead of building to better, he had organised to rob.

Brotherly love — love which ought to be the fairest, the most conspicuous flower in the garden of civilisation — was but a rare

little flower, — beautiful, indeed, but the other plants had grown up around it; this little frail flower was hidden away among the wilted leaves, while the great gorgeous-coloured ones overshadowed it by their brilliancy. They were interwoven by long, strong tendrils of a vine with gay flowers and tempting fruits. Its name was greed, and its fruits were gold.

And *love*, the little flower hidden among the leaves, stood and longed for deliverance, for more light, for more air, for the coming of the gardener, — not the hireling, — who would clear away all this rank growth, smooth aside the wilted leaves, and finding that flower of all flowers, speak to it in his kind way, give it sunshine and light, water it plentifully that indeed it might become the flower of all flowers and its fruits ripen into human happiness, — not happiness for the few, but for all.

Ah, but where was the gardener?

Lyder heard some one open the door from the sitting-room into the hall. He heard

his father cough as he walked upstairs to his room.

Involuntarily he ran towards the door, but stopped with his hand on the knob.

"Insanity, insanity!" he murmured. "He will not understand." He must see Helga and tell her how he suffered.

He opened the door a little, and beckoned to her, as she passed through the hall.

She looked a little astonished, but smiled, as she entered, until she saw how pale her brother was, and that he had been weeping.

Lyder pressed her down into a chair; then, walking slowly back and forth, sometimes stopping suddenly in front of her, he told her of his troubles, of all except the one he felt sure she would not understand. He said not a word about Guri.

Helga sat leaning her head backwards, rocking slowly.

Her eyes were almost closed, but when he stopped in front of her once in a while, she opened them wide.

She was thinking of how lonesome it

would be when Lyder left; of the great house with its echoes of times long gone by; and the garden, and their walks and trails in the forest; of the books they were reading together, the music they were practising, the thoughts they were interchanging!

She sprang from the chair and embraced him.

"You can't go, Lyder," she cried. "It would be selfish to leave me here. I want to go out in the world too and struggle. I am not afraid of life."

"Not if you were poor?" interrupted Lyder.

"Yes; but we are not."

"Are you sure?" And he told her what his father had said that evening.

She again seated herself, rocking back and forth.

Lyder paced the floor. Both were in deep thoughts.

Helga first broke the silence.

"Then you will be a man, Lyder. You will have to struggle for a home of your own;

you will feel happy when you have built it, far more so than if you stayed here and — "

"Ah, but I *hate* struggle," he interrupted. "I am not fit for it, I want peace. I am not afraid of work, work of the kind I am suited for; but struggle, struggle with the hope of obtaining riches — I detest the thought. I can't."

"You need not," she said lovingly. "Get a piece of land such as you said you wanted; make a good home of it, work with your hands out in the fields under the open sky, as you say you like — and, Lyder, I will come too, and we will make roads and trails in *your* forest, we will tend to *your* flowers when evening comes. I will sing for you while you work in the field; we will eat the bread you have raised on your own land, the fruits and vegetables which have grown there. We will make it a little world of our own, just as we have here inside the high garden-wall and hawthorn hedges. Such a life! — you your own master; I with you! O Lyder, let me go! If you go alone, I am

afraid you will become like the others. You will forget everything for money — "

"No danger of that, little sister," interrupted Lyder, almost gayly.

"Don't, don't, Lyder; don't feel that you must laugh disdainfully at what we have enjoyed together. I am afraid you will shake your head when you think of this, that you were a child after you were grown; for you will get energetic, and that means — greedy. I have been told — Hans and Petra told me — that out on the American prairies everything is energy, calculation — money. Hans says that constitutes the whole of life over there, — even more so than here at home. You won't, will you, Lyder? You won't forget the flowers? You will love what is tender and beautiful. I do think it is such a mistake that to be manly you must be devoid of higher feelings, you must be more or less overbearing, emotionless and selfish."

"Oh no, Helga."

"Yes, yes, that is the way they are, all of

them, or the most of them, — the successful men. I know — don't you think I do? — how Jens Birk and the others ridicule what they call your effeminate tastes, — your love for nature and music? They say you are silly, a crank; that you are not practical; that it is good for you your father is rich, as otherwise you would starve cultivating your flowers. Petra has told me it all. But you will show them, won't you, that a man can build up a home of his own and maintain it, and yet find time to cultivate the best in him? I do wish you would like Hans Gram and Petra. They have opened my eyes to many things. They are both so simple, so open, so advanced, so perfectly independent in thought. It is refreshing to be with them. A man devoid of these nobler feelings can make no woman really happy, I care not how much money he succeeds in accumulating. I shudder when I think of the power of money!"

Helga had risen from the chair. They were now sitting side by side on the edge

of the bed. He had taken her hand in his. They both dropped into their own thoughts.

"I am afraid that kind of man would be called by the world a wishy-washy, sentimental thing," Lyder said, half to himself.

"Don't misunderstand me. I have no use for bleached, long-haired men, soft men of leisure. I like them strong, sunburned, with honest eyes; large men, if you please, men with some purpose in life besides making money, — strong and independent."

"But how can they be such in civilised society? and if they are, how can they remain so and not sink in the onrushing flood of selfishness?" he objected.

"If so, and I am afraid it is almost impossible, live for yourself, Lyder; *leave* it all and retire into solitude, where you will have the least possible to do with the outside world, where you can cultivate the best in you and use your best influence on others, and you will be happy, I am sure. Hans and Petra are right, — money is the curse of it all. Lyder, I am so glad: maybe they will let me

go too, now that we are no longer rich. Maybe I shall have to go — I am not much afraid of the world. I hope it has not yet become unwomanly to be a woman. I long to work, to use my brain. Poor papa," she added quietly, as in thought; "and mamma, it will be hard on *her*. She has been so delicately guarded all her life, she is not fit to endure hardships, dear me! and I know that if I stay here any longer I shall become the same way. To have responsibility — just think of it, Lyder! what a happy feeling that must be! to be responsible to yourself — to humanity. Perhaps after you have gone and prepared the way I can go to you. I like to teach. I should like to teach little children. Then when the day's work is done we will go on exploring trips into the woods — the new, the strange — it will be delightful."

Lyder put his arm around her.

"I knew it," he said; "there is no one who can help me like you. I sometimes think that the sooner I am dead the better;

but when I speak to you, sister, you have a strange power over me. I know what it is," he said smilingly; "it is sympathy, love. I need love, and there is so very little of it in the world. But wait just a little bit, sister; you shall see — I feel something has grown strong in me here to-night — wait, we shall see."

VII

IT was Sunday, and Guri was free.

After weeks of cold autumn fog and drizzle, the sun had risen in a cloudless sky, and the clearness of the chilly air imparted its purity to all objects.

The large yellow leaves of the maples and the smaller ones of hazel and birch lay pasted to the wet ground.

A spicy, wild fragrance came wafted on the fresh breezes, as the last lingering thought of the Norwegian summer.

Guri seated herself, high up on the hillside, on a rock by the road, — the short cut between the king's highway and the tarns.

Below her lay the city, its two spacious harbours plainly visible with their flag-decorated vessels and small steamers and boats.

The exertion of climbing the steep grade had painted faint, red roses on Guri's cheeks; her bosom was visibly rising and

falling, as she breathed the fresh air in full draughts.

She was glad it was Sunday.

She felt so happy that she sang, while the large bells of the cathedral rang out their deep, harmonious song and all the church-bells chimed in with them.

Sometimes that song of the bells seemed very near, then again it was carried far off, growing muffled, almost dying away; then suddenly a jolly, whirling breeze brought it back again.

But as Guri sang, she became serious. She often had such dark apprehensions break in on her mind, when she felt the happiest.

She thought of the old vicar, and in memory saw the two-storied, white-painted house, and the garden in front.

The vicar's loving words and his warning to her came with the other memories.

And here she was again walking the forbidden road to meet him whom it was forbidden her to love.

But how could she help loving him! Indeed, she would give her life for him. He had met her with a power stronger than her will. She must love him as long as she was herself.

"But, my God!" she said, half aloud, "what is the use, Guri — Guri, what is the use? He will never be yours — yours to keep."

Soon he would meet a fine lady, if he indeed had not already, whom he would love and marry, and then — forget Guri.

Forget? Hardly. She had given him so much of herself, *forget* her he never could.

She need not speak to him any more when that time came — if she only might see him once in a while, meeting him on the streets — if she might read a recognition in his eye, one which said, "You and I, you and I, Guri; we have had much together, you and I."

She commenced to sing again, a song Hakon, her father, had taught her mother while they were young and courting.

Hakon's mother used to sing it long, long ago, when they first lived by the sea, before Grandmother Guri had married and moved to the mountains, where she was carried off by the avalanche.

Eh, the fiord!

A small steamer was going out, soon disappearing from view among the islands.

It was going to her old home; she knew by the course it took.

She could almost hear the cry of the sea-birds there.

Oh, if Lyder van Meeren were but a poor, ragged fisher-boy, then she might love him all she pleased; as it was, he might love her, but not belong to her.

Soon he must be here. He had told her to wait for him there on the rock; then they would walk together over the mountain-ridges into the solitude of the heather-covered moorlands.

There he was at last, now hurrying up the old road, waving his hat to her.

Soon they were walking together, he help-

ing her where the ground was steep or rough with large boulders.

The fresh breeze had blown her three-cornered kerchief from her head down upon her shoulders. She looked rosy and happy, her lips parted showing her fine teeth, her eyes dilated and sparkling.

The solitude deepened, as the city and the fiord disappeared behind the first crest.

Before them, towards Blaamand, lay rolling heat and dark marshes.

To the right, visible through the clefts, down between the mountains, lay the silvery tarns.

The jolly mountain breeze danced and twirled among the heather.

He took her hand and they commenced a wild run — faster and faster. They seemed to glide along on extended wings with increasing rapidity. They had a mutual feeling of being liberated. Behind them, at an increasing distance, lay the narrow world; they were free, free!

Such an indescribable happiness as that

sensation brought with it! It drove away all sensuality, it left in them both a wonderfully passionate love, — the gentleman, the peasant girl, and the mountain solitude!

They had reached the very crest of Blaamand, — one immense, naked granite rock, smooth and rounded, crowned by an old beacon.

The wind carried them to the summit.

On the other side was a blue abyss with tiny, twinkling tarns at the bottom.

Guri clung to Lyder's arm, as they stood suddenly at the brink. She felt drawn towards the deep, and uttered a faint "Oh." Still breathing heavily after their long run, they seated themselves with their backs against the beacon as a shelter from the strong breeze.

A hawk was soaring listlessly, far below, over the tarns. Once in a while it uttered a piercing cry.

Far out to the west, past the islands with their low mountains, lay a narrow blue streak, — the ocean; and on the other side

of that trackless highway of the world lay the great new country with its prairies, its rivers, its enormous lakes and forests, its desert, its civilisation, its energy, its strife.

And as Lyder looked over this immense wilderness of mountains and water, he thought how insignificant were human laws compared with those grand eternal laws of everlasting nature.

He had almost forgotten that this was the day of leave-taking.

It made it all the more difficult to come to when he looked at Guri. She was utterly unaware of his plans.

How beautiful she was, with her rich hair loose over her back, her eyes glittering with life and happiness!

She remained silent from an overpowering feeling of love, of being alone with him, where she dared be his. She felt the fulness of his power over her, and she gave herself humbly into its possession.

His hands played in her loosened hair,

tying it jestingly under her dimpled chin. Then he kissed her. He took that long, soft hair and enveloped his own head in it, laying his cheek close to hers, feeling the smoothness and warmth of her light skin, inhaling the fragrance of her pure breath.

She forgot everything, — all consequences of her love, — everything, except the present vibrating enjoyment of it.

But — the ocean, — that long, narrow streak over yonder, — the ocean!

He must speak to her now.

He felt his breath growing short; he almost gasped for it.

He had forgotten all for a while in their wild dance over the heath, that this was to be almost a hopeless good-bye, — a good-bye forever.

Tears started to his eyes.

The old fear rose in him of the cruel, merciless world, as it is to those who are poor and fallen. He could have uttered a loud cry of anguish; and to keep it back, he involuntarily threw his arms around her,

pressed her to his bosom, stammering, "Guri, Guri."

She nestled to him like a kitten, receiving all his caresses, smiling faintly with an expression of blissful rest.

And yet, how often when alone and in her thoughts suffering the penalty of her love, had she not felt herself hopelessly plunged into despair! Even the kind old vicar would condemn her, and she had made up her mind that he never should, and that never a spot should appear on the name of that man whom she loved. There were means by which it could all be kept secret. If it came to the worst, she would take the life of that little being which she felt below her heart, and to whom society denied the right to be born, whose rights after its birth the laws of the land would curtail, — put on it for life a burden of shame and contempt. Had she not seen, out there in the country, how such children were brought up, how they were degraded and ill treated!

But when she was with him out among

the mountains, life seemed light; she forgot everything for his caresses; she was happy.

Lyder pressed his folded hands between his knees.

Guri was about to take his arm and push him towards the abyss, just to scare him a little, when she became aware of the deep earnestness of his expression.

She stopped suddenly.

"Lyder," he had insisted upon her calling him so, "why do you look so sorrowful?" she asked quietly.

He glanced at her, while his eyes again filled with tears. Gathering all his strength and steadying his voice, he slowly, quietly laid before her his plans, told her that he must leave.

"If I am ever to make a man of myself, Guri, I must go; but there are two things which make it very hard for me to leave, — the one, a dread of the struggle for existence, the battle for life which awaits me; the other — the other —" and he looked at her through tears, seeing her as an embodiment

of all she had been to him. "The other, — could you guess it?" he added, a slight break coming into his voice.

But she gave no answer. She evaded his glance, as if her eyes hurt; but, as they at last met his, and she saw the tears glitter in them and then trickle down his cheeks, all her love came into her features; bending her head under the great burden which unawares had settled upon her, she burst into a deep, subdued weeping, which shook her whole frame, till, after a desperate struggle, she closed her lips, and with one deep, vibrating sigh humbly delivered herself into the hands of fate.

VIII

IT was a dark night, late in that same autumn.

Down at the harbour a policeman was walking his beat, up and down the long wharf.

A fine drizzling rain had been falling the whole day. The air was raw, the water dark, gurgling in restless motion among the timbers of the landing.

The gas lanterns up the street looked sleepy in the thick air. The sky, entirely overcast, hung low over the harbour whose long, narrow water-alleys were lost in the darkness between the large warehouses and wharves.

All this part of the city was wrapped in utter darkness except for the impure glare of yellow light from some low longshore saloon or ill-smelling restaurant. But farther back and higher up from the shore, where the city was built on broad terraces with wide streets

and little gardens, shone a host of twinkling lights in the thousand homes visible far out on the fiord, and welcoming the ships bound for the harbour.

Alongside the landing lay an English steamer with the lights from her bull's-eyes wreathing like fiery serpents on the black, restless water.

A short distance away rose the old fort, its dark walls and bastions and the high Walkendorf tower half hidden behind the silhouettes of leafless lindens.

It was getting late.

A few pedestrians, who had been pacing the quay with no other visible aim than killing time, had gone home.

An equipage came rattling over the cobble-stones down the street, and rolled with a hollow sound down the long wharf. It stopped by the gang-plank of the English steamer, and Lyder van Meeren with three of his *bons amis* stepped out.

They hurried across the gang-plank and into the smoking-saloon on the deck.

Lyder ordered champagne and produced a box of cigars from his valise.

Aunt Katarina, a rich maiden sister of his father, had given him a five hundred crown bill, telling him to use it for amusements on the long journey and sometimes think of her when he did so. She had always been fond of Lyder.

He had made up his mind to begin right now. Once more, and for the last time, he would be one of the *bons amis.*

He felt a reckless desire to forget. He must drown that constant whisper of his conscience, drown it in wine that sparkles, in laughter.

He listened, seemingly with great enjoyment, to the equivoke anecdotes of his comrades. But there was a crack in his laughter; his friends did not hear it, but he himself felt it.

He must be strong; how could he otherwise succeed in the world? He must tear himself loose, violently cut the thread with one rash stroke, *and be a man.* He yet felt

his mother's and sister's tears on his cheek; that tall, stately gentleman, his father, he too had wept strangely when he embraced his son and bade him good-bye. Away! —*Away* with it! Drown it all in wine and laughter! Yes, he was one of the *bons amis* that night.

A stupor fell over him as he stood by the railing of the ship looking at his friends walking up the wharf arm in arm, staggering drunkenly, singing, in a fearful way with hoarse voices, some operatic drinking-song. The first gray light of earliest morning fell over the last picture of them. He tried to imprint that picture on his mind to cover up all the others of that day and all the days before, that it might be easier for him to leave.

Lyder was drunk too, for he had taken as much as the others; but he could yet hear the echo of voices far, far away,—his mother's, Helga's, his father's last farewell. It rose as a high wall between the past and his future. It hammered in his head.

His lips were burning, and he ordered more champagne.

Standing alone in the centre of the smoking-saloon, he filled the slender glass until it overflowed, and with drunken laughter emptied it — for *Love*. He dropped the glass, breaking it. He looked around, and in the gray light of morning, mingled with the yellow glare from the lamps, there seemed to stand in the open door, a tall girl in black woollen gown with a white kerchief pushed from her head down over her shoulders. She was terribly pale, and her eyes wore an expression of unfathomable despair. In that mingling of natural and artificial light, she seemed to tremble. She did not open her lips nor change her expression; that frown of despair was frozen into her forehead. She looked at him steadily, her arms stretched before her, the pallor of death on her cheeks.

Lyder gazed at her with glassy eyes. He gave a deep swallow to gain the power of his tongue, and made a desperate struggle to gather his senses. He ran toward her,

but she moved away noiselessly, without stirring a limb.

She moved out through the door, across the deck, never altering the deep frown of insane despair on her forehead. She glided on over the gray water, — fainter, fainter, fainter, then melted into the dark, fog-laden mountain.

The propeller made a rumbling noise; the sailors passed back and forth on the deck, busy with their work, while Lyder still kept staring in the direction she had gone. He expected that phantom of his mind to reappear; but all in vain.

Gathering himself together, he walked to his stateroom; exhausted of vital power, he soon fell into a slumber full of strange, haunting dreams.

The steamer was speeding out the fiord with Lyder van Meeren on board — out, out, with his future at her prow.

IX

WINTER fell.

The poor suffered from cold and deprivation. Bundled up in rags, they walked from one wood-sloop to another with the hope of saving one farthing on a bundle of brushwood.

The charitable institutions held meetings and contributed funds to ameliorate the great need. But there was too much of it. The relief was but momentary. Men who never before had needed charity, bent their heads and killed their pride to keep their families from starving. Work was very scarce, and rumour of war became loud among the civilised nations. And in the countries not engaged in the quarrel there was a wild desire that war might begin, and in some way relieve business. From the pulpits ardent prayers were sent heavenwards for

relief; but the snow fell listlessly deeper and deeper over the land.

The sun broke through the clouds, and glittered in snow-crystals on the frosty mornings. How grand and beautiful was nature; how light and cheerful everything looked in the sunshine, wrapped in pure, white winter dress; but what a darkness in civilised society: — hopes of wholesale slaughter of men as a means of financial relief for those who looked on, or for the one who was to be the winner of the battles! Selfishness, thoughtlessness, and civilised ignorance and crime ruling the world!

But those who were on the upper steps leading to the throne of mammon continued to enjoy life. The balls had never been more numerous or more elegant, nor the ladies' toilets more costly. Champagne flowed in torrents; gayety, reckless extravagance, and flightiness accompanied the hard times, though it was impossible to tell who would be the next to tumble into the abyss and draw others with him. Even some of the

oldest, hitherto considered impregnable business houses closed their doors, and Berentz & Son were among them.

Up in the north a terrible hurricane swept over the cold sea and dreary islands. It howled in concert with the merciless waves, it lifted huts from their foundations; untold lives were lost and homes destroyed; bitter poverty stared into the faces of many. Fathers, sons, and husbands seeking bread on the sea — gone forever.

The great merchants in the cities, backed by capital and social privileges, charitably contributed, when times became so hard, to the temporary alleviation of the needy. The young folk of the privileged classes gave theatrical performances, the returns of which were also sent northward. And the papers spoke with loud praise of this Christian spirit which helped those in need. Beautiful young girls embroidered and stitched for the bazaars, which usually ended with an elegant ball. But, up the coast, the sea sang its old song. Treacherous, treacherous is the sea; not so

charitable as the rich, not so loving and wise as Christian society!

Helga was walking home late one evening from a small party with Hans Gram and his Petra.

Petra was an old schoolmate of Helga's. She had always been a little odd; not pretty, but very bright.

Hans Gram was editor of "The Liberal Press." He was a stanch upholder of the liberal ministry, and had earned the deep hatred of the plutocratic and official party for the way he attacked its policies and some of its leading lights.

Helga was coming more and more under the influence of these friends. She had learned from them to think independently. They had opened her eyes to many abuses which formerly she either had not thought of at all, or else had considered *must* be so — for society was that way.

They accompanied her as far as the city arch. From there, Helga had only a few steps more to the garden gate.

The wind was blowing icy cold from the frozen fiord, and she forbade her friends to go any farther out of the shelter of the houses to the open country road, particularly as Petra had a slight cold.

Helga passed through the dark arch of the city entrance. As she reached the garden portal, she saw a woman standing in the deep snow, leaning against one of the lindens.

It was a young girl dressed in shabby finery.

She stood bending forward, with her head against the tree-trunk, spitting out blood upon the snow. When she heard footsteps, she lifted her head. Her face was yellow, her eyes were glassy and underlined with dark streaks; her countenance wore a peculiar wilted look in the moonlight, as she nodded to Helga and smiled.

The wind drove the clouds with great velocity, making the light of the moon very uncertain. Helga stepped out into the deep snow and went close to her.

"Are you sick?" she asked.

The girl nodded. "Can't you see it?" she replied, and laughed foolishly. "Don't you know me, Miss Helga?"

Helga scrutinised her.

"You ought to, for I am your sister."

The girl was evidently drunk. A horrible smell of liquor accompanied her words.

"Let me help you if I can," said Helga, kindly. "Of course we are all sisters, and if I can do anything for you, I will."

"Yes, there are — there are many kinds of sisters," said the girl, looking intently at Helga. She took a step closer to her, so her body touched hers. Her walk was unsteady; Helga involuntarily withdrew a little.

"Don't — don't be afraid of *me*, Miss. I — I —"

"Let me help you out of this deep snow," said Helga, feeling ashamed of her fear. She took her by the arm and led her to the sidewalk. "Where do you live? Can't I help you home?"

"No — you — can't; no — Miss, not even

if you *are* my sister, for my home — home — is where I happen to go, — eh? I feel kind of played out to-night or I would see Jens Birk — you know him — eh — 'course you do — he pays well when I tease him for it, by God."

Helga shuddered. She came near losing her hold of the girl's arm, who moved still closer up to her, swallowing the blood which came into her mouth and spitting loudly.

"Whu — that tastes like raw meat. Had n't you better let go of me, Miss Helga, though I *am* your sister, for" — she whispered it very confidentially — "*your* father is *my* father." Then she laughed hoarsely and hiccuped.

"Woman, what do you say? Woman!" ejaculated Helga. "*You my* sister, *my* father's child! — Oh, you tell me a falsehood!"

"I do, do I? — Now don't you look so scared, Miss — Miss Helga, you fool you; it is not you, it 's your father — and I

would n't have told you if I had been sober, I — I don't *think* I would. If he just would give us more money, lots of money — if he had let me be nice — *nice* — *nice* like you," and she patted Helga's boa, "you might not have been ashamed of your sister then; but can't you go and tell him what I have to do to get money? Don't you see, if I had money, lots of money, then I would have — well, all I needed, don't you see?" And she laughed an ugly, cracked laugh.

Hardly knowing what she did, Helga had thrown her arms around the drunken girl and pressed her to her breast.

"Come," she said lovingly, "come; we will go quietly up to my room; you shall sleep in my bed; I will make a good fire for you; I will sit by the bed and nurse you, for you are sick. Oh my God! my God! How is it possible, my God! — Come, come, little girl, *come.* I shall see to it, you will not suffer any more —come."

"No, no, I won't, Miss. The old man would n't like it; he would kick me out in

the morning — oh no, no, no, I have made trouble enough between him and your Ma — no, I won't — I'll just sail into town again, I'll sail into town again and find Mother — there is a dance at Valhalla to-night, and lots of my friends there — if only I could stop that damned blood!"

"Let me go with you, bring you home. You must go to bed, child, you *must*," said Helga, her voice filled with deepest emotion.

"That 'ld be pretty company to be in! You 'd get a nice reputation, even if I am your sister! No, no, you just go to bed, yourself, see — eh? And dream of your sweetheart. Puh, it is n't the first time I have been bleeding; it helps to eat snow, but," and she whispered confidentially, "I am a little drunk to-night — those 'mosjeus' you know — eh? I *know* you know how they are — eh? Goobye;" and she ran towards town, swaying in her walk.

Helga held on to the heavy brass knocker on the door.

She pressed it hard in her gloved hands.

The wind swept the clouds past the moon, casting flying shadows over the snow-covered country. A chill ran through her when she saw these dark shapes hurry over the smooth surface of the frozen fiord. They seemed a host of ghosts coming to visit her. She dreaded their touch, — furies, who were coming to take her peace away.

She fumbled in her pocket for the key. She had hold of it, but dropped it again. A dizziness almost overcame her.

The bright moonlight glittered on the frozen fiord, then again it became dark. A few flakes of snow fell slowly, trembling. Up among the clouds the wind was busy, hurrying them eastward towards the mountains, but down on earth it had gone to rest; not a twig moved on the large trees in the park. There was a deathly silence as in the crystal palace of the snow queen.

Helga was in doubt whether to enter the home. Had she a right to stay there, when she had a sister out in the night — drunk,

spitting blood, fallen; sold, body and soul — for money?

Helga struggled to find an excuse to comfort herself withal, to carry along that burden which so suddenly had fallen upon her.

Fate? Was that her sister's fate? Had humanity no power against fate?

"Indirectly," had Hans Gram said, "indirectly through fate and its evolution." No power, after all!

That girl had been cast where she *must* go under, deprived of everything which could elevate; the daughter of a fallen woman, having grown up in the hot-house air of depravity and social condemnation; tempted from her earliest youth, with lust-stained blood circulating through her veins even before she was born — yes, the greatest sin had been done to her before ever she was born — and how had she not been sinned against since then! And how about herself, Helga? Sheltered behind these high walls and hedges, where it was so quiet, so refined, where there breathed comfort and plenty

through the large airy rooms, where in summer the flowers smiled upon her; brought up in the sunshine of love, with everything needed for the best development of mind and body!

Then there arose before her the image of her tall, handsome father, so clean-looking, so refined in his manners, so above the majority of men, — daily going in and out of his luxurious home, while out on the streets a child of his was sinking deeper and deeper into that utter darkness of legalised sin which finds its relief only in death.

Could it be true, what this girl had told her?

Helga had a strong intuition that it was. In her mind was a faint recollection of once having been told something, which she then, yet a child, did not comprehend.

Yet how was it possible? *Her* father!

Could it be true, what Hans Gram said, that there was an irresistible current in life which carried humanity with it, entirely at its mercy; that all, the whole organised

society, was responsible for the sins of the individual; that only through a slow evolution the good would some day conquer, when there had come new generations of parents, and new generations and generations again, which should give their children inheritances with increasing percentages of desirable qualities; when civilised society had become civilised indeed, and love — true, unselfish love — ruled the world?

Ah! was he to be blamed?

Could she condemn him, push him away from her with utter disdain, the man who, after all, was her father? Or — or — indeed, had there been something stronger than his will, which had carried him off against his own ideas of right?

Fate — fate! Hans and Petra must be right; it was *all* fate.

How could there, then, be question of one human being *forgiving* another? Ought it not, instead of forgiveness, to be sympathy, love? Ought it not, instead of condemnation, to be an extension of helpful hands to

lead the fallen ones into better ways, — a transfer of desirable powers through love from the strong to the weaker one? Ought not civilised society to be a unity of ameliorating forces to carry humanity on to higher ideals, higher lives, greater happiness? Yes, yes — Hans and Petra were right.

But how could he let his child drift along in the centre of the highway of vice?

"Never condemn, but sympathise," Hans and Petra said, when she sometimes was rash in her opinions. She would go to her father, speak to him openly about it. He was not hard, he was generous enough. People had told her he gave much to the poor.

Perhaps, after all, it was an invention of that girl to extort money from her.

Helga turned the key in the lock and entered.

X

ALMOST every two weeks there came a letter from Lyder, who was in California, where no winter came.

He sent home pressed flowers, picked among the sand-hills by San Francisco.

He told of the great, blue Pacific Ocean, of the beautiful Bay of San Francisco, of the semi-tropical gardens, the Chinese and their theatres, their temples, and restaurants; but he never wrote a word about work.

Was he not at work?

Herr van Meeren made no remarks about it. His wife had blamed him bitterly when her only son, whom she loved so much, had left their home, sent out in the world like a common young man without influences. She blamed her husband, because she knew that father and son did not agree very well, and because of old Herr van Meeren's apparent indifference to the future of Lyder.

Then there was that hussy with her daughter bothering her. They dared to smile at her on the street; the girl had even the audacity to nod to her. They wrote threatening letters demanding money. She who herself had been always true to her husband — she who had loved him so much, never, never could have been unfaithful to him; she the daughter of great forefathers who for generations had held high offices in the king's service! Forgive? Forgive? How forgive when she could not forget? How lonesome she felt, at times, in that cold, cheerless indifference without hatred but also without love! How she pitied herself!

And she wept when alone, — wept great, silent tears of pity for herself.

Lyder's letters were a relief. It consoled her somewhat, that he enjoyed his life in the far-off country, that he spoke with pleasure of his plans, and his return some day to see them all. His letters were beautifully refined and emotional; they stirred her deep-

est feelings. The more she pitied herself, the more did she love her only son, so misunderstood by his father, who had sent him unprepared out into the world. Even with the word "America" was associated something harsh and rude and democratic; it made her shudder.

Helga was growing more quiet, more thoughtful, more earnest. She was constantly at war with herself. A strong feeling had sprung up in her against her father, which she sought to stifle, but which she felt would become too strong for her if she did not soon speak to him about that girl.

Then there came a letter from Lyder telling that his money was gone, and he did not know where to find suitable work. He thought that by the advent of spring it would be more plentiful. He asked his father if he would kindly send him a few hundred dollars to carry him through until then.

In former days Helga would have sympathised with her brother when their father

denied him that help; but now her eyes were open to many things.

Work suitable for him! She knew what that meant. The young Mr. van Meeren would not condescend to become a common labourer, when he could not get a position of command; and what right had he, a novice, to expect such preference?

"Ah me!" sighed Helga. She was yet unsettled in her new faith. It seemed hard to throw overboard all the old dogmas, those ideas of right and wrong by which she had been governed since childhood.

Whenever nervous and haunted by doubts, a tempting voice still whispered to her, "Ah, well! Life *is* that way; the world and society are made that way. Take what comes; it is only the very few who can choose the position in life for which they are best suited. Money *is* and *must be* the first consideration, the alpha and the omega."

The same evening she wrote to Lyder to be satisfied to begin at the foot of the

ladder. She advised him to go to work on a farm, and when he was fully convinced that he knew enough about it, to try to get a home of his own. "I hope," she added, "that you do not think manual labour degrading — far from it. Hans Gram says he knows from experience that it is absolutely necessary for the mental and bodily well-being of any man; that, in fact, his moral control of himself to a great extent depends thereon. It is over-work, resulting in ignorance and poverty, which has degraded labour and is still degrading it; but it is not the labourer's fault but that of society, which pays the smallest share to him who carries the burden of the day."

Helga enclosed her letter with her father's.

Herr van Meeren sent his son a small amount to tide him over a few weeks, inside of which he must find work, suitable or not.

Herr van Meeren's letter was written in a tender tone, telling Lyder that the reason he did not send him the amount he asked

for was not lack of love, but just because he loved him. Furthermore, as Lyder already knew, nothing was left of his fortune, and he would have had to borrow the money, not knowing whether he would be able to pay it back. He wrote to his son earnest words out of a life full of experience, expressing the wish that he himself were young again that he might commence anew. He even condescended to add in a confidential way that the more he saw of life, the more assured he became that in only the fewest cases did inherited fortunes bring blessings to their possessors. To bring true happiness, money — which meant daily bread — must be earned by the sweat of the brow.

"Ah me!" sighed Herr van Meeren, as he closed the letter. "If I were only young again and poor!" And somehow he had a vague feeling that there was something in the old social institutions which ought not to be so, even though it always had been so.

Yet, could he forsake his old opinions? How was it possible for him to drive away the facts of former prosperous days? And now? Lack of faith everywhere, dissatisfaction, hatred. Bah! He almost hated these radicals, these — these traitors! What else could he call them?

XI

IT was New Year's day.

The evening before, there had been a great ball at the Schlütters'.

Helga had felt compelled to go, not to insult her old friends; but she had long since ceased taking any pleasure in these society affairs.

Jens Birk, who was now married to Karen Schlütter, asked her for a dance.

She could find no excuse for refusing him, much as she hated to feel herself close to a man who made so terrible a use of his superfluity of money and another's need of it — a woman's need.

It was a waltz she gave him.

The string-band played well. Jens Birk was a graceful dancer, despite his obesity.

The lights were mellow and dreaming; the air was filled with perfumes; they whirled and whirled, — Jens Birk and Helga.

He had courted her once, and she had loved him a little, several years ago, while very young. He whispered to her of those days; he spoke about them with such tact, in such a sympathetic tone. And they whirled and whirled, light and graceful, — oh, so very light, — amid the perfumes of wilting flowers. She forgot his sins. A strange nervous happiness floated into her soul, so light, so indescribably light, she felt. Her nostrils dilated, but she did not feel tired; her mind seemed benumbed, but through her body thrilled a sensation of strange delight. A pressure from his hand — still whirling — whirling — the perfumes of flowers and elegant, rustling toilets — the other dancers whirling past them — then lights and everything in a blur — fast carried off toward dreamland — and every once in a while that thrill followed by the benumbed sensation — again a faint pressure of his hand — his arm around her waist moved nearer to her body; she wished, in a half-comprehended way, that dance would last forever —

intoxicating everything; everything in a whirl farther and farther away, dimmer and dimmer —

Suddenly a great fear took possession of her. She could have screamed. Her sister — for God's sake, her sister out there in the snow, drunk, degraded, sold — sold to Jens Birk for money.

"Please," she whispered, "let me go — I am tired — *please*," she demanded; and gracefully he brought her out from among the dancers. As he found a seat for her on the sofa next to Fru van Meeren, he saw she was very pale. He made a low bow before her, and thanked her for the very enjoyable dance.

A little while after, he was told, she had fainted and had been taken home by her mother.

This first day in the new year awakened under a clear sky. The sunshine glittered in the crystals of the frozen snow. The church-bells sang cheerily in the pure morning air.

People, attired in their Sunday best, were on the road to church to thank the Father of all for his good gifts in the year which had passed, and to ask him for his blessings in the twelvemonth to come.

The old, sombre hymns of the Lutheran church rose from the immense pipe organ, mingled with a thousand voices into an unharmonious whole. But they came from simple, needful hearts, and brought consolation and strength, — these old, old hymns, which carry with them the history of the Christian Church from ages back.

But all around, the mountains stood silent in winter clothes, reaching far into the frosty air.

Helga had made up her mind to begin the new year rightly.

She would speak to her father about what oppressed her. All day she made excuses for not doing it, such as, that it was the first day in the year, and she would not commence it disagreeably by reminding him of such trouble.

But when twilight came, and Herr van Meeren took his walk upon the king's highway, Helga met him. She made it appear as if it were a happy accident, and, smiling, she laid her arm in his.

He looked unusually well that day, she thought, — so becomingly dressed for an elderly gentleman, in his high, stiff shirt collar and white silken cravat, his well-fitting black broadcloth suit and high hat; so tall and handsome with his snow-white hair.

Ah, if there only had not been that — but — about him.

It could not possibly be so!

They walked along, meeting many of their acquaintances, greeting them in passing, wishing them a happy New Year.

The street lamps were getting farther apart.

They had reached the last one on the highway, at the gate of the last suburban residence. From thence onward was only the light of stars and a faint reflection from the snow.

They reached the group of rowan-trees, where there was only a narrow trail with deep snow on both sides.

It was here she had made up her mind to begin.

Pressing close to her father, as if afraid of the darkness, she looked up into his face to see if its expression was sorrowful or happy. But she could read nothing there.

He turned his head towards her when he felt her look, and pressed her arm gently.

Something in her eyes, as they met his, touched him. He wondered if she knew the full extent of his love for her, — how much he loved both her and Lyder; how indeed he constantly longed for his son, not feeling quite sure if it had not been a little hard, indeed a little too rash in him, to deny Lyder that money. Surely it had taken all his will-power to do it. How he wished he could have kept him at home, after he showed the desire of doing his best, — at home, where he could be near him and guide him, give him the benefit of his experience, so dearly won.

Even if his own life had become no life at all, he could yet live it anew in his children.

In sanguine moments he had come so far as to dream of a reconciliation with his wife. There was nothing on earth he desired more than that; he would give his life for it.

"Father," said Helga, in a loving voice, looking up to him, "father, I met accidentally one evening a fallen woman." She clung to his arm as if afraid to lose him. "It was outside our portal. She stood leaning against one of the lindens, knee-deep in the snow; she was somewhat intoxicated, and on the snow was a dark spot of blood where she had had a hemorrhage of the lungs. I felt so sorry for her."

"Did you not speak to her, help her? Poor thing! What a pity that there must exist such beings!"

Helga began to feel safe. How could he speak that way when he himself—

"Yes; and what do you think, father?—in her intoxicated state, she wanted me to believe she was *my sister!*"

Herr van Meeren did not answer. Helga looked questioningly at him and pressed her cheek against his arm.

That silence sent a terrible fear through her.

Herr van Meeren was pale. He held her arm pressed to his body, afraid lest she withdraw it before he could find words to answer her.

"Perhaps — yes — perhaps she spoke the truth — perhaps. She was not your sister, but — " He hesitated an instant, then added slowly, "*my* child."

"It was long ago, Helga," he continued, speaking firmly, as he laid his arm around her, hearing her weeping — "long ago, when I was young. I was tempted and fell — she *is* my child," he added with a deep, earnest voice.

The wind piped softly in the naked crowns of the old rowan-trees.

Helga never knew how it escaped her lips; but freeing herself from her father's arm, she looked defiantly at him, and in a cold voice

asked, "And is that the way you treat your child?"

There came no answer; but Herr van Meeren did not lower his eyes before his daughter.

"She told me," Helga continued, "that to earn her bread she, your child, must sell her flesh!"

"Stop, stop, Helga; stop — she told you a falsehood. I have given them all they needed, and more than that; but her mother squanders all I give her; she has brought her daughter up in that way, after her own licentious life. I — I — have done my utmost to save that child, but in vain. It were far better she had been killed when born — that she had not been born — but, my God, what can I do?"

"Nothing — nothing now — very likely her days are numbered. Her dissolute life will soon make an end to her diseased body; but her *soul!* What responsibility! It seems improbable to me that there was not a time when she would have been saved

with your money, your social influence. Even if you did not take her into your home, could you not have bettered her opportunities, made a woman of her, — used every possible means of saving her? How is it possible that you, whom I have loved and revered, looked up to, whom *everybody* looks up to, has a child on the street slowly dying the worst of all deaths; that your hands are covered with the heart-blood of your own child! My God, my God, have mercy! I know your excuses, father; you need not speak. The code of Christian society forbade your taking her into your home; your wife would have forbidden you; your friends would have lifted their hands in wonderment and disdain; a howl would have arisen from all around. Rather let this human being be lost forever, rather let the laws — these insane laws — be carried out; deprive this child of the right of her father's home, an outcast before she was born, one — even if she grew up a good woman — the world would eye askance. And then

you threw money to them; but that money stained your hands, for where was the love which excuses all, purifies all its deeds? Oh, I am *ashamed* of my *father!*"

Helga buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

She had spoken excitedly, thinking only of what burned in her to be uttered; but seeing her father's face full of grief, seeing him stand there receiving uncomplainingly her lashes, she suddenly felt a great pity for him. She went close to him, and embracing his arm leaned her forehead against his shoulder, and said gently, —

"Oh, father, what more right had I to your home, your love, and to all you have given me than she? Oh, that home with its beautiful garden! I have no right there any longer, with a sister out in the dark streets. A call has come to me from your child; I must search the highways and byways for such sisters; I shall never have peace until I am at work in some way or other to redeem that burden of debt with

which the favoured opportunities of society have encumbered me. That home is not *my* home. I can *stay* there, for you and mamma are there; but I must redeem it in some way, or it will become forbidden to me. Oh, *father!*" Again she pressed her face against his breast and sobbed.

Herr van Meeren's eyes were full of tears, his whole body trembled; but he could find no words.

Hope, hope! where was there hope for him?

He saw all plainly now. Yet had he not striven against it, — against that combination of forces stronger than his will, which had been working against him, which had ruined his life?

"Child," he said, "my own dear little girl, what can I say to you? Ask your forgiveness? How can I, when I see no way in which I could have escaped; when, as I look back upon my life, I can see how one thing has worked into the other, how one power has combined with another and grown

strongest when I was the weakest? Oh, I have suffered for years the pang of loneliness, of being unforgiven by others, by myself. I see no hope, no hope! My little girl, it is terrible to stand here in the evening of my day hunting for *hope*, for escape. Child, if I had known then what I know now, it would have been otherwise. Life is so strange, so terribly undefined and contradictory in its demands, that often not before a man is ready to die does he see it in its totality of failures. My heart is bleeding to think of that child of mine living such a life. But what can I do *now?* Take her, polluted as she is, into my home? I will try again to save her, send her away into the country, among good people. I have done it twice already; but she is wild, there is something so utterly licentious in her nature — I despair of saving her."

Despite Helga's attention to his little likings and despite her caresses, Herr van Meeren felt that there had come something

between them which never could be totally blotted out.

He could not have believed it possible that a child of his would ever speak to him in that way.

Helga's words, "I am ashamed of my father," kept repeating themselves in his thoughts with that expression of disdain in which they had been spoken.

Those words had separated them for life.

He hoped, when alone and feeling bitter, she never again would mention those things to him, for after all what business of hers was it, what explanation did he owe *her* for it? Had everybody combined against him?

This lack of respect in children for their parents was one of the influences of the time. He knew from whence it had been brought to poison the inexperienced minds of the young.

He had seen with considerable displeasure the preference Helga showed for that Hans Gram and his emancipated wife, and for those radicals their friends. It was just

what he had been fearing, that they would turn his child's mind against her parents, kill love and obedience through their doctrines, tearing down the good old laws under which society had prospered so long.

Helga's experience at the New Year's ball had made her think; it helped her to forgive, —"never judge, but sympathise."

There were wonderful powers in life — wonderful. She had felt a power stronger than her own mind; it made her understand much, excuse much, love much. It came in time to keep her from hating her father, yes, taught her to love him more than ever.

XII

IT had been snowing the whole day. The wind whirled the soft flakes mingled with rain-drops around the street corners. People held their umbrellas low over their heads. Everybody was in a rush, no one seemed inclined to stop for a chat; news had little value, their sole desire was to get under shelter from this soggy cold.

Inside the double windows at the Van Meerens' it seemed very cozy. There was a homely fragrance of salted rose-leaves, which had been put on the stove, where the fire murmured and crackled.

Helga stood by the window. She looked out, lost in thought, at the whirling snow-flakes.

She had had a letter from Lyder, that morning.

He was working in a large vineyard, learning to prune and plough; he said he was

happy. He wrote that he had never felt so well before. He had captured the heart of his employer's wife by playing for her on the piano and taking interest in her flowers. She had asked all about his people at home and seemed greatly interested. "Norway is a part of Germany, ain't it?" she had asked. Helga laughed aloud when reading it.

This letter was not so full of dreamy longings as his others had been. Lyder had met a young man in that strange country of selfishness, who he hoped would prove a true friend to him. "But here everybody is for himself; here everything is money. Money! Indeed it is the alpha and the omega."

Helga remained dreaming at the window for a while, then went to the piano and sang Schubert's "Ständchen," at the same time dreaming herself away to the land where, instead of snow, there were sunshine and flowers, — to that far-off country where her brother walked behind the plough in the long black, steaming furrows.

Herr van Meeren sat later than usual that evening at his desk in the inner office, a small, plainly furnished room with smooth, pasteboard-covered, painted walls above a low wainscoting. On the wall hung a large map of Europe, a few ship-models, and a water-colour of his finest ship, "Berent van Meeren," with all sails set, cleaving a very blue sea with very accurate waves following one another in military order.

Herr van Meeren had dismissed all his clerks, and as Mr. Olsen, his cashier, — the old, faithful servant who had been with him so long, and also with his father in his last years of business, — walked towards the door, a rush of emotion overcame Herr van Meeren — the next day would throw this old, faithful servant, too, out of work. It was fearful to think of the consequences to so many homes when it came to be known that Herman van Meeren was bankrupt.

He extinguished all the lights, save the one above the desk. His private office was behind the other larger one, having double

doors between them. It was some distance back from the street, with two small-paned windows looking out upon a large cobble-stoned yard.

Herr van Meeren put his elbows on the desk and rested his head in his hands, searching every corner of his resources to find hope. Before him lay the notification of that large promissory note which had to be paid the next morning. He could not borrow the money for it any longer and be honest. What would be the use, anyhow? After that one came other notes. It was yet a long time before spring, when all expected better times. The harbour lay full of empty ships; one could almost walk from deck to deck.

A large French steamer, with a cargo of fish-spawn for the sardine fisheries, when only a day out from the harbour had run ashore in the dense snow-mist and was lost.

It was hoped that would raise the prices on fish-spawns; they were ruinously low.

Herr van Meeren found himself lost in a whirl of disconnected thought; in vain he

looked for a way out. There was no one to whom he could go with his troubles, not even to his own wife — oh, no! For the past was not forgotten.

He put on his overcoat and hat. He bent down for his cane, which had fallen; and slowly walking through the darkness of the outer office, he came near forgetting to extinguish the lamp.

The wind pressed against the door as he opened and shut it again. It was dark and cheerless in the deserted street.

The sign over the small tinshop kept up a busy clatter in the wind. The street-lanterns looked dim in the snow mist.

Herr van Meeren took a short cut through the narrow back streets and alleys towards the city entrance.

He would take his walk, though of course not so far as usual. He felt a desire to go out on the highways, where he could be alone with his thoughts. The storm did not trouble him.

He had banished many dark thoughts

among the high mountains. When a little boy, he used to climb them in spring to find the first primroses and anemones; in summer he went thither for berries and alpine flowers.

To-night there was a terrible pressure on his brain, his limbs felt sore and tired. Still he hurried on with an involuntary desire to get out to the fresh air among the hills.

Anders, the cobbler, in the narrow alley back of the hospital for the lepers, was busy at his work. Herr van Meeren stopped to watch him through the small window. He was sitting by his stool with a small, smoking lamp, and his coarse, ugly wife sat by, watching him.

They were evidently discussing some important question.

Anders the cobbler was happy, at least he always looked so; those small black eyes of his above or below the large spectacles seemed always ready to enjoy a joke.

"Happy Anders," thought Herr van Meeren, and walked on.

But how about himself?

After his walk he would return to a home no longer his own — that old home of his forefathers, it did not belong to him any more. Soon it would be sold under the hammer, and others would inhabit it, — the old home where he had been born and where he had spent his happy childhood and youth, where he had planted so many trees, — trees which had grown large, which he loved to look at, reminding him, as they did, of the days of his sorrow-free youth. There would sound strange voices from behind the high garden walls, happy laughter when he passed outside, poor and pitied. That was the worst of all. And all those men who had looked up to him, who had taken their hats off for him, who had been dependent on him, who had trusted him with important public offices!

What would become of him now? A beggar supported by his relatives, a burden to those who used to be below him in public estimation and power.

Oh, if he could go somewhere with it all! If only she loved him! She never had, and

now all this would be one more reason for her to blame him.

Herr van Meeren stopped short, when he reached the arch at the city entrance.

Ah, what was the use!

He hurried though the arch. A few hundred steps farther he passed under the portal, climbed the back stairs on tiptoe and entered his room. Without lighting the candle, he went straight to the chest of drawers, and took out something which he put into the outside pocket of his overcoat.

Silently as he had entered, he stole out again, following the king's highway, in haste.

He was convinced that no one cared for him, not even Helga. Had she not said, "I am ashamed of my father"?

Ashamed!

Then that child of his on the street, beyond redemption!

On the old road across the hills, sheltered between high stone walls, the snow was deep on both sides of the narrow trail.

A little farther on, under the rowan-trees, she had said it, "I am ashamed, *ashamed* of my father!" and, "Your hands are stained with the heart-blood of your own child."

The poor little girl, she did not understand him. "Ah, God," he prayed, "keep her in Thy protection, that the world of strife, where the strong trample over the weak, may not handle her too roughly."

The place was easily found, even in the darkness, — the rowan-trees, the bend in the stone walls, the steep hill ahead. He would not climb the hill, — oh, no, he wanted rest.

He leaned against the wall.

There was a dull report, audible but a short distance through the snow-thick air.

Herr van Meeren sank on his knees, his body swayed back and forth a few times, and he fell on his face into the deep, soft snow.

The wind sang in the trees on the hill-tops; but down between the high stone-fences under the old rowan-trees all was very quiet.

And the snow fell heavier and heavier, listlessly covering up everything.

XIII

IT was spring-time in California.

Red, downy leaves brightened the long branches and slender twigs of the wild grapevines along the booming creeks. Orioles sang in the tops of the large oaks. Orchards were delicately abloom in pink and white. Humming-birds buzzed from flower to flower, and the hills were tapestried with many-coloured blossoms and grasses.

The blue of the sky was deep, deep, the blue of the summer-lands, and dotted with fleecy clouds.

Soil and air were moist, life-giving; insects busy, and birds in love.

Lyder van Meeren worked from morning till night, following the plough between long rows of blooming fruit-trees.

In his thoughts he saw a distant land where yet the snow was covering the ground. He saw the gray sky, the bleak country, the

cold winter sea; and the same overpowering sadness came upon him as when the autumn before he had watched the last naked skerry sink below the horizon.

He liked this work just because he could think while at it, — send his thoughts wherever he pleased.

If he was tired when evening came, rest was so much the pleasanter.

But he often felt lonely, and in his loneliness it was a question with him if to yearn was happiness or pain.

Against the background of the past stood the clear-cut figure of a slender girl. She stood by the footlights of his scene of life in her plain black dress and white kerchief, and a great fear — was it conscience? — at times overpowered him.

He was seemingly no nearer a home of his own than formerly. Any day might bring the news that his father was bankrupt. The few dollars he earned by his hands, — what did they amount to for a man with tastes and inclinations like his?

He associated very little with the people about him. The friend he thought he had found proved a disappointment, for that man also loved money more than friendship.

On Sundays Lyder went out alone among the hills, dreaming, longing, almost to the verge of despair; indeed, he sometimes passed that verge, and with folded hands and uplifted eyes would gaze into the deep sky, begging for aid from an Almighty Being living up there somewhere.

And for what did he want aid?

To obtain a home of his own.

Not a very unreasonable desire for a working-man. Only a small piece of land where he might work for himself and call to his side a woman whom he should love and who would love him.

She must be tender, he thought, with a mind to which his could open freely, a woman to whom he could go safely with everything, — his most secret thoughts.

Was Guri Hakonsdatter such a one?

He hardly dared answer this question to

himself. How dared he then write to her and make her promises?

Yet at times he longed so desperately for her that all doubts were banished.

His father's earnest face stood ever clearly before him; its varying expressions were so clear in his mind they almost made him shudder.

Indeed, he knew his father loved him, and that at the bottom of his heart he himself loved his father. He could not understand why they should not have understood each other, — they were so very much alike.

Then he had great plans for the future.

When his father should become compelled to shut the doors of his business house, the whole family should come out to Lyder. He felt that he could take care of them all, yes, even he, who so often gave up all hope of helping *himself*.

The reaction was sure to follow, and when it came everything looked hopeless and foreboding. Then it was he longed most desperately for Guri, for her veiled eyes, for her

voice, for her caresses. Then the nights seemed endless, when he tossed himself in his bed, sleepless after a day's hard work.

Towards morning he would cry himself to sleep, closely pressing his pillow like a child hiding its face in its mother's lap.

The next day he would throw himself with all his combined will-power into the work. He did the work of two, and, when evening came, he was very tired. The night brought him unbroken rest, and in the morning he would awake as bright as the cloudless Californian summer sky.

XIV

IT was a warm day.

The petals of the fruit-blossoms were slowly dropping.

The sky had already become dulled by smoke from a mountain fire.

Lyder threw himself on his bed to rest for a few minutes after dinner.

He folded his arms above his head; his face was sunburned and unshaven; his blond curly hair had grown too long and looked unkempt.

Falling into a nervous slumber, he dreamed he saw his father stand by his bed, speaking to him in his earnest way, telling him that the next day everybody would know Herman van Meeren was bankrupt.

The old man looked sad and tired; his eyes seemed bewildered, looking about as if in fear of some one. He laid his hand on Lyder's forehead, — that narrow hand with

the long thin fingers and the heavy, plain gold ring. "Good-bye, Lyder, good-bye, my dear boy, good-bye," he said, so lovingly, so sadly; then he faded away.

Lyder awoke. The sun was shining into his face. He felt dazed, his mouth was dry, the blood beat in his temples; he hurried off to his work, thinking anxiously about the dream.

A few weeks after he received a letter from Helga.

The writing became blurred. The letters began to dance before he could finish reading it. A dull pain ran through Lyder's head; he breathed heavily.

"My father, my poor father!" he stammered.

He hid his face in his arms; leaning against the rough wall of his little room, he wept such tears as he had never shed.

Night was slowly stealing over the land. The distant quak-quak of the frogs along the creek mingled harmoniously with the chirp of the grasshoppers. The soft breeze

from the sea, laden with the spicy fragrance of the Californian summer bloom, came through the open door, as if taking pity on the young man standing there, lost in his sorrow.

The stars glimmered through the crowns of the long-needled pines, where the soft winds kept up their everlasting faint hum, the lullaby of nature.

Lyder threw himself on his bed without undressing.

What thoughts, what recollections that came and went, what desperate longing, what repentance, he experienced on that summer-night!

The long, long summer-night of the south lulled him at last to sleep with its dizzy whispers, while the large moths were busily fluttering low among the flowers, and the ground-spiders drew their long glittering threads across the roads and lawns.

XV

THE tidings of Herman van Meeren's suicide spread like wildfire over the old city of Bergen. Many were the fancied reasons for the deed.

After the books of the house were examined, there was no doubt but that the assets would cover all debts; but that was all.

Fru van Meeren was very dramatic in her sorrow. She fell into hysterics by her husband's grave, but in time settled back to life, taking it as it was, sharing the home of a widowed brother in Christiania, — a man in high position, one of the king's most trusted men.

Helga shed few tears. Something very earnest had come into her features. Her voice was fuller, more sonorous. The expression of her eyes became at times examining, penetratingly so. The old look of warmth and affection had become deeper

through an added expression of one who has suffered. Grave and resolute, she stepped out into her new surroundings to battle under social laws. She accepted a position in the editorial sanctum of Hans Gram.

It was at small pay; for newspapers, especially liberal ones, which are not backed by interested capitalists, are not a source of great riches in Norway.

But she received enough for her needs; and her position threw her into association with men and women of liberal minds, who sympathised with the lower classes of humanity. Helga began to see plainly the wrongs which were daily perpetrated against them, under the protection of social laws; and she meant in the future to have something to say on the subject, to throw herself with her whole soul into that battle for liberty fought by the masses.

The past with its fairy-castles in the old park inside the high garden-walls and hawthorn hedges, seemed a dream of long ago; in fact, she did not understand how it ever

could have had such attractions for her. Her energies had been slumbering, lulled to sleep by carelessness, while outside roared the battle.

She wished to help clear up all that sediment of greed and selfishness, at the same time knowing well how great was the task, how slow the evolution of society, and how little, how insignificantly little, she herself was.

"But there are many of us," she said, "many, and each day we are getting more numerous."

She became an enthusiast in her work. People of the old school spoke of her as "that emancipated Miss van Meeren." The climax was reached when she cut her hair short.

"I only wanted to relieve myself of that headache occasioned by my indoor work," said Helga, smiling to Petra, who told her what people said. "The doctor advised me to do it — indeed it hurt me to sacrifice it — but let them say what they please."

That sister of hers on the street had found her last resting-place in the potter's field.

She had been one of the numberless similar sores festering in the unhealthy body of Christian society. She had sold herself and made a living by it, while honest workingmen starved in the hard times. But so it happens in civilised society.

XVI

THERE was a great jubilee among the religious people of the old city of Bergen.

Love-feasts and prayer-meetings were the order of the day.

An industrious missionary had brought home from Zululand a real Hottentot,—an ugly thick-lipped fellow, who in broken Norwegian spoke of the great glory and love of the Christian God, who had sent the Saviour for the poor black people as well as the white. Moses, as he had been baptised, was no fool. He enjoyed all this feasting; he enjoyed being driven around with the missionary in the bishop's carriage, that he might be interviewed by the great and leading people of Christian endeavour.

Moses proved a most excellent advertisement.

Poor widows, hysterical old maids, ignorant servants, small-minded emotional tradespeople, and a few hypocrites adored this black brother, and contributed to the missionary fund according to their means; yes, it is to be feared that some of the first mentioned starved themselves to give to it.

And the money-bag of the missionary society became swelled like a plutocrat's stomach.

Stockings were knitted and shirts made by kind-hearted women for the black converts in Africa, that they might look decent in their native kraals; and from the pulpits of the large churches sounded forth eloquent petitions for the dark brethren.

Then there came an unexpected "cooler" from "The Liberal Press." Helga had made her maiden effort. In a quietly written article she asked if it were not better to sweep first before one's own door, then before that of others; if there were not heathenism, darkness, and nakedness enough right there at home, and need of money and

food to satisfy the starving, both bodily and mentally, without sending clothes and the means gathered from the innocent and poor to the Kaffirs, who, living in a southern land of eternal summer, were in little need of clothing; who were happy in their kraals and hunting-grounds, who seemed to take more willingly to the fire-water of civilised nations than to their religions.

"Look you, you Christian people, and behold the pallid men, the sorrowing, overworked mothers, the scantily clad, hungry children right outside your doors, who, if the eye of the police were not so watchful to maintain law and order, would be begging in the streets.

"Good people, instead of constantly raising your hands in prayer for the poor, where you yourselves are the ones to act, banish your selfishness, your antiquated ideas, and join in the struggle for more equality, for better social laws, — for the victory of that love which proclaims that men are brothers, and that in a father's house not one child

shall live in thoughtless superfluity, while the other children bear the burdens of the day and starve."

Then — to the consternation of the good, innocent people — bad rumours became loud about Moses. He had begun a life of amours in the "dead-falls" of Christian society; he was reported to be spending his pocket-money in an ill way, and the sharp tongues of the city wagged wittily about Moses.

"Hush, hush!" said the missionaries, and packed Moses back to Africa, where he hastened to surround himself with many wives.

But from conservative organs rose a mighty cry against "The Liberal Press." "Hovedstadens Avis" led them all. One most reverend gentleman after the other rose in the full wrath of his Christian indignation, and with eloquence and scriptural quotations swung the flaming sword of salaried Christianity against the rising atheism of the time, against all this godlessness in "The Liberal Press."

They spoke with righteous hatred against these radicals who through flighty talk and criminal literature spread dissatisfaction and infidelity among the lower classes, — dissatisfaction with their lot in life, and hatred for those whom an all-wise God had chosen for the more plentiful gifts of the desirable things in life.

They gave scriptural proofs that such instigators had existed since the dawn of history, though their strength, and the venom of their ungodly attacks, were never more active than at the present day, when they made use of the hard times, oppressing all civilised nations of earth, to attack the only true church of God, and its ordained servants on earth.

"By their fruits ye shall know them."

The reverend gentlemen met, shook their heads, spoke in low voices among themselves, condemning "The Liberal Press," its editor, its whole staff; they dragged into light personal rumours, and the sinful failings, in the past and present, of these men.

But on a cold, gray evening, in a woodshed behind a large city mansion, seated on the hard floor, was a pale girl.

She had dragged herself into the darkest corner behind the corded wood.

The small, four-paned window at the end gazed at her like a cold, inquisitive gray eye.

It was only by the utmost exertion of will that this poor, lonely lass kept back the cries of pain which threatened to escape her.

She had forgotten everything — her responsibilities, yes, even her own mother and the far-off islands of her childhood's home. She had forgotten the kind old vicar who prayed with her so long ago. There was only one desire left in her, — to hide, hide from everything in the world, from the merciless gaze of civilised society.

Like the thief in the night, like the blood-stained murderer, she desired nothing more than to cover up her tracks, — to hide, *hide* from that terrible monster there outside that small window with its cold gray light.

And this young girl — what was her crime?

She had loved.

Loved?

Yes, but without the consecration of the servant of the Lord. She had not asked his reverence nor his dignitary if she might; she had *merely loved.*

That disposition which, according to the belief of Christian society, the Almighty God had created in her—*to love*—had been made stronger than her power of will to obey social laws.

She was a fallen woman, as it is generally called. She had been *too natural.*

She crept as far into the darkness as she could, her soul filled with terrible fear, a ceaseless anguish.

She listened for footsteps, she fought back the pains which surged through her.

And with all, how did she not long for him to whom she had given herself in love! Oh, but he was so very far away!

She stretched herself full length upon the floor. It gradually grew dark where she lay; only that gray eye in the wall remained,

perhaps a little sleepier, but constantly watching her.

Tears of pain and of despair, of utter loneliness, trickled down her cheeks.

There came a short relief.

That girl had become a mother. To her nature had given a child. It cried when it was born; and its mother, insane with terror of the prying eyes and ears of her fellow-beings, strangled, with her own hands, that little babe.

Dark?

Can *you* fathom the darkness in a mother's mind who kills her own babe?

The gray eye in the wall looked at her; it seemed to grow larger, larger, to come nearer, nearer. It glared so terribly, so inquisitively; it searched for her baby, it fell over her, trampled on her, sending cutting pains through her body, — yes, away into her very soul.

"Ah — oh me!" A great lull followed. Where? Where was her child? She groped for it in the dark.

Finding it, she pressed it to her bosom; this was *his* baby, — HIS.

She saw him plainly before her, she embraced him in the shape of her murdered child, — him, for whose sake she had killed it.

Rest, oh, such rest! She felt it come; a benumbed sensation crept over her limbs; that rest became deeper and deeper, more and more senseless, — such a perfect rest without the least effort. There were flitting dreams of long ago, of *him*.

Her life was slowly ebbing away. A sudden quiver — one spasmodic struggle slowly passing, and she settled into the arms of the angel of death, who, never looking back, gladly carried her away from life.

XVII

IT was a summer evening.

Lyder van Meeren was driving home from the railroad station, at the mouth of a tunnel penetrating the heart of a forest-covered mountain.

It was a little out-of-the-way station, with a signal-box and a small building containing a waiting-room and the station-master's office.

Across a rocky ravine stood a few white-washed dwellings, a store, a saloon, and some rough-looking outbuildings and warehouses.

Several years had gone by since that summer evening when Helga's letter brought Lyder the tidings of his father's bankruptcy and suicide. The wound which it had cut in his mind had gradually healed; but the sore was still there.

Many an evening, when tired, had he lain down in his little room, not able to sleep, blaming himself, again blaming his father, then society, which seemed to have combined against him.

Lonely, he yearned for sympathy, for a single soul to whom he could go when the world seemed all darkness.

He was economical with the money he earned, but there came months without work. The small towns were full of idle men hanging about, eating and drinking up what they had earned in the busy time; and Lyder was among them.

Formerly he looked with disdain upon the working people, condemning their ignorance and lack of interest in everything but the satisfying of physical wants. Now he understood them. The labourer was a beast of burden the greater part of the year, and when without work his mind was filled with anxieties.

Oh, if he only could get a home of his own! It had become almost a byword with

him; he would murmur it often in a half-conscious way when languid, or tired of a struggle with so poor a result.

But how should he ever be able to obtain this much coveted happiness?

He had read somewhere that one's first duty was to be happy.

Easy to say, he thought. Of course, there were happy people in the world, a great many perhaps, but so many more who were not, at least not as happy as they ought to be.

And here were immense tracts of farming-land, thousands of acres, whose rich proprietors never had done a day's hard work in their lives. A hundredth part of one of these tracts would make a prosperous, happy home, perhaps, for some one. As it was, the ground lay but half cultivated, while homeless men went walking in the dust outside the barbed fences, casting yearning looks over the wide stretches of fertile soil held by rich men for speculative purposes.

Lyder thought with dread of a life spent as he was spending it now, — the slave of others more favourably situated than he.

Was *he* going to be like one of these gray-haired men he met on the dusty road with their rolls of blankets on their backs, tramping from place to place, with vacancy staring from their colourless eyes, where thoughts seemed extinguished, and in their stead glared an almost insane expression of yearning, — constant hopeless yearning, steadily degrading, — all noble feelings deadened simply to keep the body alive?

"Much better be dead," he ejaculated, "much better die at once!"

And the more he saw of the life which surrounded him, the more did he understand its barbarism.

Here was a land with broad valleys whose fertility could not be surpassed, glittering rivers, and safe harbours; a southern land under a warm blue sky, where the tenderest fruits ripened in abundance, where the golden fields waved in the endless summer

sunshine, and yet all this crying need, these thousands of homeless people begging for work, these thousands of homes where men were struggling enslaved by the ruler of the land, — money; the serfs of the favoured few, the priests in this golden temple where there are many gods, but not those of love and mercy.

Is this the great land to which I have come, where stands the cradle of liberty, — the land towards which the oppressed of the world look and stretch their arms in supplication, where they hope for deliverance, — a land where men are brothers?

"Surely it is a sham, a sham," he sighed.

Tired at last with waiting, Lyder one day wrote to his aunt in Bergen, telling her how everything stood, and how he longed to own a small place, asking if she would not lend him some money, or, better, give it him, since he could not promise ever to pay it back.

Having mailed his letter, he went out, and

he hunted among the mountains for a suitable place to buy.

Two months later Lyder was the happiest man in the land. He held in his hand money enough to purchase a home of his own!

That was the way he came to be with his team at the little station in the heart of the red-woods that summer day.

And Lyder sang in the woods as he slowly wound his way out of the deep cañon.

No wonder he was singing.

Away yonder on the mountains lay his home. A small cleared spot was plainly visible among the brushwoods, above the trees.

The solemnity of the deep red-wood forest; the shaded road where it was so cool on that warm day; the deep, blue cañons; the distant faint humming of the wind in the tree-tops; the leafy greenness of the sycamores and oaks; the aroma of the woods,— all this combined to make him blissful. No

wonder he sang. His song was a *pot-pourri* of melodies from distant countries and ancient days, — old Norse and German folk-songs entwined with ribbons of his own melodious thoughts.

His horses were taking their own time. They moved along with drooping ears, too lazy even to switch away the large horseflies thirsty for their blood; perhaps the good beasts also were lost in reveries of greener pastures in a sorrow-free youth, before they were bridled by man.

And the echo of his voice from the woodland told him that Nature was listening to his songs. The hum and murmur and soft whisper from the cañons told him how beautifully she also could sing; and he listened to that music which experience had taught him yields itself so willingly according to the state of the human mind, — which is grave and sombre if such be your mind; rippling, animated, if so you desire; gay, happy, thoughtless, if you are young and sorrow-free; dreamy if you are in love;

deep, caressing, hushed with deepest emotions, if your mind is earnest, and you have been seeking the shades of the forest to be alone.

And Lyder had forgotten everything, everything, save the forest that was casting over him its mantle of rapture.

So enraptured was he, indeed, that summer day, as not to notice a figure sitting on the large gray rock by the roadside.

He was looking in another direction, out over the undulating forest-covered hills sinking boldly into the deep cañon.

"How d' ye do?" said a musical voice close beside him.

Startled, he looked round. A young girl with a pale, refined face smiled at him from under a white lace mantilla.

She had large, trustful velvety eyes, and leaned her head a little to one side when she spoke.

Lyder involuntarily pulled up his horses, and looking very foolish, said nothing.

"Would you let me ride with you up to

Buena Vista?" she asked. "I have walked very far, and doubt whether I have strength enough to walk all the way back."

"Oh, certainly." He jumped to the ground on the instant, but was too confused to assist her.

"Yes, but then you must give me your hand and help me up," she said, a little roguishly. "Oh me, that was quite a climb."

Lyder, in his dirty working-clothes, hardly knew whether he dared speak to this refined, well-dressed girl, but he managed to steal a shy glance at her. She was beautiful, he thought, with her well-shaped somewhat aquiline nose, her emotional lips faintly dimpled in the corners, and those large, dark eyes veiled by such long lashes.

Suddenly she turned, and spoke in that curiously tender way, with a faultless pronunciation, such as makes even the English tongue musical.

"These red-wood forests are so lovely that one forgets one's self and walks too far. Is

not your name Van Meeren?" she added somewhat abruptly.

"Yes, madam; but how do you know *my* name?" asked Lyder, astonished.

She smiled. "Why, very easily. They gave me a description of you up at Buena Vista. They told me you would be returning from the station, having passed this morning, and that I could safely ask you for a ride if I became too tired. There are not many people who use glasses hereabouts, so you were not hard to recognise. But you would n't even help me into your waggon," she said, with the playful ease of one who has associated much with different classes of people.

Lyder blushed. There was something very tender in her voice; it made him feel safe.

"How lovely she is, but how very pale her face," he thought

"Do you stay up at Buena Vista Springs?" he asked.

"Yes, I came there yesterday from Santa Cruz. Is it not delightful at Santa Cruz?

— that blue, rounded bay of Monterey — I love it."

"Yes, it is beautiful there." Lyder began to feel at home with this interesting stranger. "I grew up by the ocean," he continued, "one not so blue and warm as this, but for the most part gray under a low-hanging gray sky. It is cold-looking, but no less grand. I often long for it."

"I am afraid I shall also long for the ocean," she said. After a while, "It can be so unmerciful too."

"Have you ever seen it during a great storm?" he asked. He did not feel the least afraid of her any more; there was nothing at all condescending about her.

"No, I always wanted to go, but my brother would never allow me to. He is always so afraid I shall catch cold and die. It must be very grand."

"To die?"

"To die? Oh, no. The ocean in a storm; perhaps, it is grand to die, too."

They went on silently for some distance.

The quails were calling in the thickets. The red evening-light had crept up from the blue cañons to the very highest crests, then it faded entirely away, leaving the cañon still bluer with the haze from the forest fires; only the highest peak of Loma Prieta glowed for a while, when the whole mountain with its soft contours of brushwoods changed into a deep purplish blue.

Lyder was conscious of a great desire to let this little girl know that his mind was not as rough as his clothes, that his tastes and feelings were perhaps as refined as hers; that his home, once one of the richest, most aristocratic, had left an inward if not an outward mark upon him. He became afraid that, after all, she considered him but an ignorant labourer. He feared this opportunity to show her that he was not would be of too short duration. But why so concerned? Because here was at last one with whom he felt his mind, his thoughts, his desires could blend and give to him that greatest enjoyment of all for which he had longed.

After making several ingenious excuses to himself for telling it all to her, he began. He felt sure she was interested; she looked at him with so friendly an expression in those deep eyes of hers. Lyder became almost eloquent as he dwelt upon the charms of his dark, wild mountains at home; the glittering glaciers; the long, narrow fiords of his native country. With transport he spoke of its songs, its fairy-tales, its poets and great composers, ending by asking her if she had ever heard any of Grieg's music.

"Oh yes."

"Really?" It seemed strange to him to find any one in these far western forests who knew that music, so closely connected with the nature of his own Norseland.

"I heard you singing," she said. "I suppose it was you — far down in the cañon; it sounded very weird and beautiful."

Now they had reached the crest of the hill, where the land was dotted with orchards and vineyards. On the other side it sloped into dusky cañons and long spurs of dark,

forest-covered hills; and beyond them, far, far down, the great Pacific.

A faint reddish glare spread over the western sky in which the evening star was barely visible.

The surf along the rounded bay of Monterey resembled a narrow white ribbon.

The air was softly vibrating with the incessant chirp of the grasshoppers, and heavy with the drowsy aroma of blooming oleanders and ripe fruits.

Up to the left on a hillock, surrounded by spreading live-oaks and tall red-woods, lay Buena Vista, with its ever-blooming garden of roses and oleanders, and large, blue fig-trees on both sides of the entrance.

It would have pleased Lyder van Meeren could that drive with the little maiden whom the forest so unexpectedly had given into his care, have extended throughout the evening. This clear, melodious voice, so close to him, filled him with a strange desire of travelling onward, onward into that red evening air, high, high above the dark forests and

the ocean, onward, onward toward the evening star.

By the gate he helped her down from the high seat of his waggon.

Gay laughter and a murmur of voices sounded from the verandas and the trees.

"Thank you so very much for this pleasant ride, Mr. van Meeren," she said.

He would have liked to say, "I hope you will give me the pleasure of repeating it;" but how could he in his old, dirty working-clothes — to her, so well dressed, so deliciously beautiful, so perfumed?

She flitted with a rustling sound up the broad gravel walk, disappearing in the twilight behind the shrubbery.

Up in the hotel the lamps were being lighted.

Somebody played dance-music on the long-suffering piano. It sent a shudder through Lyder to think of her, who to him seemed a revelation of the purest harmonies, entering that atmosphere of degraded music.

He whipped up his horses, and the heavy

waggon rattled down the short, steep hill, crossing a brook, and ascended the mountain.

That horrid voice of the piano died away, but the memory of the little woman who had so suddenly come into his life stayed with him. He still saw her flitting up the gravel walk in her white, rustling dress, with the lace mantilla over the dark hair. He looked at the footboard where those dainty feet in the tanned shoes had rested; he yet felt the touch of her narrow velvety hand in his, as he assisted her from the waggon. "The pleasant ride" — pleasant, she had said. Was it merely an empty compliment, or —?

Ah, but, Lyder van Meeren, thou art poor, *poor*, and that, in civilised society, means — degraded. While she? Perhaps very rich. Yet he felt she was one who could sympathise with him, one whose mind could blend with his. An intuition told him that they were made for one another; only — rich and poor!

How deep was the abyss between them — yes, and between the son of Herman van Meeren in former days and himself to-day!

Oh, this rattling, clattering money! Away with it! Away, far from it all into the solitude of nature; only there was sympathy for him! But had he not let others suffer as he had commenced to suffer now? Should money also destroy *his* happiness? Poor Guri Hakonsdatter! poor little lass! She stood before him with that frown of despair on her forehead. He strove to drive her from his thoughts and in her place put the shape of the little girl from Buena Vista. In vain. She would not move; she remained there surrounded by her terrible history,— dead, frozen to a hard wooden floor, with the body of her child — *his* child — lying across her breast. He had read it in "The Liberal Press," several years ago. Helga, his own sister, had written that attack on so-called Christian society, not knowing that her own brother was at the bottom of that dark story.

Guri Hakonsdatter was poor, but he had loved her.

Guri Hakonsdatter was fair, just as beau-

tiful in her way as the little girl from Buena Vista. How she had loved him, Guri, with all her powerful, simple love!

But to-day — that little girl from Buena Vista — ?

"Get up, boys! come on! it will be dark before we reach home." The horses trotted faster in the gathering dusk.

"Helga is right; *she is right*," he repeated to himself, to drive away the dreadful doubts that ever oppressed him. "Society is responsible for the majority of sins of its individuals; but," he thought, "who is responsible for the sins of society? The individuals? No responsibility anywhere? An unconquerable evolution and retrogression of the human mind?

"How forgive, then? The one human being *forgive* the other? How can the will to obey social laws be made responsible when it is such a weakling compared with our natural desires?

"Ah, nature is responsible for it all; that omnipresent, that eternal power which has

no foundation because it always was; which has its climaxes, but no end; which, through its laws, has made us as we are, made us to serve our place in its unfathomably immense household."

When Lyder entered his cabin that night, he thought it had never before looked so disorderly nor so lonely.

There was something lacking which he had not missed until now.

He walked out again and sat down on the steps.

Far below him shone the long row of lights at Buena Vista.

The wind came over the mountains, bringing with it the bark of a fox. The sound came nearer, then slowly died away in the deep cañon.

The lonely feeling it left made him shudder. He returned to the cabin, lighted the lamp, and commenced to read the home papers. There was also a letter from his mother. Regularly, every two weeks these

letters came; but they contained the same thing over and over again, — expressions of sorrow, sympathy; long jeremiads about the terrible dispensation of Providence which had compelled her son, who came from such a fine family, to earn his bread by labour. She was always begging him to return.

Lyder loved his mother and pitied her; but he wished she would not write him such letters.

XVIII

FOR weeks after, Lyder remained at home. He worked around the cabin, clearing land to be planted the coming season with fruit-trees.

As he laboured steadily, lost in thought, there came before him a vision of a climbing rose hiding his cabin under its spreading branches. It should be all covered up, his little home, under blooming vines.

A small three-cornered flume of edgings brought the water from a spring to the cabin door. It fell crystal clear into a leaky tub, over the rim of which it oozed into a large bed of petunias. There was also a narrow bed of pansies along the north side of the cabin. Helga had sent him the seed, and Madame Pellier, the landlady at Buena Vista, had given him slips of verbenas and Japanese chrysanthemums.

He watered and watched them eagerly day

after day; to them he spoke in his loneliness, — they were his only companions.

And when evening came, he would sit on the steps and sing and dream and lay plans.

"Strange," he thought, "there is one besides myself for whom I do all this; who is it? Will she enjoy my flowers, admire my view, that tuft of drifting summer clouds, my songs? Will she enter into my thoughts, and what would she say if I followed this or that desire?" She was one whom he wanted to please; a phantom that followed him everywhere, and which had something of Guri, of Helga, something of all the women he had ever known. But sometimes it had something of his father too, — the only man he had really cared for, — yes, despite all misunderstandings, had loved.

And his new acquaintance from Buena Vista?

He watched the long row of lighted windows every evening, and when the last light was extinguished, he imagined it was hers, and went to bed.

But Lyder had his dark hours, when everything seemed lost, his work wasted, life a burden.

Then again some morning he would wake up earlier than usual, after a night of perfect rest, jump out of bed, whistle and sing, and find everything enjoyable. Work was then easy to him. Then tasks which he had dreaded gave him pleasure to perform.

He had no longings for the outside world and its pleasures, — what were they compared to that enjoyment nature gave him?

Despite his poverty he would not exchange with the richest.

XIX

ONE morning in October, Lyder started out before sunrise with his team to haul a load of wood to the station.

The air was chilly, for a shower had fallen the day before, and along the little rills a delicate hoar-frost silvered the fallen leaves.

The air was marvellously clear. The rain had washed off all the dust and smoke of the long, rainless summer, and Loma Prieta, with its dense carpet of brushwood, looked clean and refreshed after the bath.

In the garden at Buena Vista the chrysanthemums were in bloom. Most of the summer guests had left for their city homes; the gravel walks looked deserted, but it seemed more homelike there without the clatter of dishes, the inharmonious hum of humanity enjoying itself, and the eternal sound of that suffering piano.

Lyder had met the little girl from Buena Vista only once since the first time.

She was in company with some other guests, and had nodded to him in a very friendly manner. He had envied those companions of hers. Why should he not go down to Buena Vista some Sunday and see her? he had asked himself. He could don his best clothes, play for her on the piano, and show her he was not a "hobo."

But when Sunday came, he did not keep his promise to himself. He feared he should not find her alone. So he talked to his flowers, as usual, and walked far into the woods, among the tall ferns, fancying Helga with him, or that phantom shape of his mind.

Lyder felt unusually strong and fresh this autumn morning. His horses seemed to share his feeling; he had hard work to keep them from running down the steep hills.

A little ahead on the road, where it made a wide curve around the hill before re-entering the forest, he saw a woman walking slowly.

Now and then she bent over to pick up an autumn leaf, or reached up the high bank for an overhanging fern.

It was she whose name he did not know, — the girl from Buena Vista.

She had not left, then, with the other summer guests.

He recognised her by the mantilla; but instead of the white gown, she wore one of an indescribable hue — a mixture of brown, green, and red — like the leaves in autumn.

A sudden nervousness came over him. He would willingly have stopped then and there, yet he could not very well be so rude as to pass by and not offer her a ride.

So he slowed his horses, holding them back firmly.

There was something about this girl he almost envied her, — not on his own account, but for *her* sake, who once had given all of herself to him, but who did not possess this development of the soul, these refined thoughts, language and action which made the young lady from Buena Vista her supe-

rior. Yes, he envied her that she should possess all these qualities of body and mind, which in their combination could give him a happiness which he dared not hope would ever become his.

And as he slowly drove along, holding back his horses, he compared these two women and saw the difference in them.

This little maid from Buena Vista possessed that which forbade him to look at her with eyes of low desire. She was surrounded by that halo of a cultured mind which, combined with physical beauty and an emotional soul, makes the ideal woman, while Guri — poor, poor lass!

Ah, if that little maid in front of him would lay her hand in his, turn her back to the world, go with him trustfully, gladly, into the forest — higher, higher, to where his cabin stands on the hill with "God's country" all around!

How beautiful she is, how gracefully she flits from roadside to roadside, picking belated flowers and autumn leaves.

Hearing the waggon rattle close behind her, she stepped to one side of the road to let it pass; but recognising Lyder, she waved her bouquet and called out, smiling, "Don't drive over me, please."

Lyder tipped his hat somewhat awkwardly. "No indeed, I won't." Then hesitatingly, "May I — I offer you a ride this morning?"

Pushing the lace of the mantilla away from her eyes, she looked up at the high seat.

"You are rather high up; are you sure I might not lose my balance and tumble into the cañon?"

"Oh no," he answered assuringly, "there is no danger. I will drive very slowly."

"But it might be too heavy for your horses."

"Ha! ha!" he laughed merrily. "What a heavy-weight you must be! But it's all down hill, you know."

He tied the lines to the brake-bar, and with both hands assisted her up.

"Ah," she exclaimed, when well seated, "the view from here is still better."

"Your health seems to have improved," he ventured to say, "since you came here, judging from your colour."

"Indeed it has," she replied, and lowered her eyes for a second. "These forests and this pure mountain air have done all that for me."

"And the good company at Buena Vista," he interrupted.

"Hardly; there are very few people there with whom I sympathise. Besides, I left the city to be alone and rest."

Glancing back at the waggon, she said kindly, —

"It is hard work to cut wood, is it not?"

"Yes, rather, but it is healthy work. I always feel best when I chop wood. Of course it hurts me every time one of those old, beautiful trees topples over. I always think of the long ages it has taken to make them what they are, what wonderful trans-

formations of matter, what powers. They seem to sigh in falling, as if grieving over themselves; but I am obliged to clear the land to make it produce something of more value."

She looked at him attentively for a moment, then away over the cañon.

They were getting into denser and denser woods. The bluejays shrieked in the oaks, gathering acorns, and the clank of the wood-chopper's axe came wafted across from the opposite mountain.

Lyder did not hurry his horses in the least. This ride was to last as long as possible.

"It is rare to hear men speak that way," she said, after having been silent for some time. She again looked at him scrutinisingly, as if to learn out of what strange material this son of the Vikings was made.

"Most men," she continued, when he did not answer, "seem to think of nothing but money, business, — continually business."

"Yes," he interrupted, "and they don't

care if they ruin others for the sake of it, either."

"And much less a tree. Where did you get so much feeling, Mr. van Meeren; are all Norwegians like that?"

"I don't know, Miss —" He fumbled in his thoughts for her name, then remembered she had not divulged it.

"Excuse me, Mr. van Meeren; my name is Garland — Irene Garland; I should have told you it sooner."

"Irene is a very pretty name; there is music in it."

"Oh, you Scandinavians and Germans hear music everywhere. It is quite possible, though. My brother calls me Iry, and I don't like it. Oh me! look at yonder trees! and there, away down, how the brook glitters through the tree-tops. How beautiful!"

"Is your brother in California?"

"Yes, he is in business in San Francisco. He is the only brother I have. My father and mother died when I was a child."

"And I have only one sister, — Helga. I long much for her; we had a great deal in common. When evening comes, and I sit alone up there on the mountain, and everything is so quiet, I long for her. It seems hard that we must be separated. How she would admire these endless forest vistas! We were very happy together. We raised beautiful flowers, getting the seeds from foreign countries; how eagerly we watched the plants which grew from them. We made trails through the wood. I tell you they were masterpieces of civil engineering," he added, laughing.

She joined his laughter. He resumed more seriously, —

"I often think if I had Helga here, I should never feel blue. In this strange country there is no one who cares for me, and I am one of those unhappy mortals to whom life without sympathy is misery. What should I do had I not my young orchard, my flowers, and all this natural beauty around me! I am sure you would

like her," he added, then feared that he had said too much.

"Indeed, I should like to know her. Tell her, for me, that there is an American girl out here who loves nature as well as she. Maybe *she* would sing for me some of your old Norse songs; how delightful it would be! The rare, the strange, has always had a great attraction for me."

"And if she were here I should not let you two enjoy it all alone, either, *c'est-à-dire*, — I should, of course, simply be your guide through this forest and mountain wilderness. I have been on many an exploring expedition there, and I have found secluded nooks in these cañons, where the ferns are taller than I, where the brook babbles along through the eternal shades, and where there is, oh, such a music of nature's voices; then I am as happy as happy can be."

"There is that music again," she cried, "music of nature's voices. Yes, I can hear it too, only not interpret it; can you?"

"Perhaps, sometimes when I am alone,

or with one I know understands me. Away in there in the great solitude is my dream-land with its faint vibrating music on a summer night, its grand organ tones when the storm sings its oratorio."

"How beautiful! Yes, indeed, I should like to be one of you here." She gave an earnest look to her bouquet of ferns and autumn leaves. "I feel so free, so happy here. I can understand how much more it gladdens you, for you see more than I, you live nearer to 'nature's heart.' Soon I go back to the city; then it will all be a recollection of happier days. It will make me sad. Your voice is clear and deep, you hear music everywhere, — will you not sing for me?"

"I would rather talk to you."

"And why not talk to me as you do to nature?" she asked beseechingly. "Suppose," — when he shook his head and smiled, "suppose you imagine you are alone now, and sing one of your talks with nature."

He looked down at her, not sure that she

had understood his feelings, if in what she said there was not a tinge of ridicule; but her next words dispelled the doubt.

"I have been told, or I read somewhere, that the melodies of your music — the music of Norse composers — are developed to a great extent from the old folk-songs."

"Oh, yes, that is true," he replied; "but in the harmonies with which those melodies are linked together, you will hear the voices of our grand mountains. Take Edward Grieg's compositions; in them is the fairy-like whisper of the wind in the forest, the ripple of wavelets on the lakes and fiords, the boom of the waterfalls, the crushing, wild rumble of the avalanche, the shrieks of water-birds, the faint fluting of birds from the high mountain heath; the heavy, awkward steps of the troll, when he comes to dance with the *sæter* lass; the laughter and cajoling of the *huldre*, and through it all, as a veining echo among hills, sound the folk-melodies in new forms interwoven with a chaos of harmonies that seem to be issuing from among

the boulders of the rock-slides, — a medley of fairy-tales."

"How beautiful!" she said musingly. "I think I understand better now that strange, bewitching music of Grieg's. My teacher in San Francisco is a great admirer of his work. But won't you sing for me now, one of those little folk-songs, that I may understand it still better?" she begged.

"Sometime, perhaps. I have not known you long enough to sing for you. Pardon me, I know I am very odd, but, some day, when you return from the city, because you *must* come back to the forest, I will sing for you. And so you must go back to the city? I feel sorry for you. I could not live there; my life would be lost. Sometimes I have a strange wish that I could take Helga with me and that we might lose ourselves for ever in the forest. In the world one has to be hard, unfeeling, in order to succeed. I hate it all."

They had reached the bottom of the cañon where the road crossed the brook.

They drove along under deep shade. The water glittered below the overhanging trees, gliding over the pebbles and yellow leaves, and the ferns looked heavy with moisture.

Irene Garland kept looking into her bouquet, smoothing aside the leaves as if she wished to get to the heart of it. She had grown tired of these sombre, dead things. They were good enough as companions, when there was nothing else to attract her; now they had commenced to crimp up and look ugly. Silently she dropped them outside the wagon.

It was true what he said, — she knew it from her own experience. He had unwittingly surprised her secret, which had haunted her so until the forest's soothing influence had captured her, making her a part of its great soul. But as the forest had become her healer, it also awed her; she felt the need of a human soul to share the enjoyment of this "over-soul," drive away its mental apparitions.

She had searched for such a one among

the guests at Buena Vista, but in vain. It was so everywhere; men and women, they were all alike. An old lady, a motherly friend of hers in the East, had told her, "I am in despair to find so few people with independent thoughts, who possess anything worth the name of thoughts."

But to-day, on the high seat of that jolting lumber-waggon — she dared hardly believe it — here was a man who, with a foreign accent, spoke words which filled her with happiness, which even made her forget the forest, and then again led her unconsciously into its mysteries.

"Yes, you are right, Mr. van Meeren," she said; "I felt it long ago, but dared not think it out, for it would not be according to the ideas of all the others. This civilised society is a sorry institution. It is as you say — one could long to lose oneself in the forest never to return. But am I too inquisitive, if I ask how you, a man, have come to look at things in this light? — you who have so much more advantage of those laws than we

women? I can hardly believe that there has existed any one who would be willing to give up an advantageous position in the world because he saw it to be unfair. I have got into the habit of thinking that it is only the losers, the sufferers, and not the gainers, who see the need of reforms."

"Miss Garland, if you had experienced what I have, seen what I have seen in my short life, — the unmerciful, cruel hand of Christian society destroy what was noblest and dearest to you, — you would not speak of men as gainers and women as sufferers; you would hear one ceaseless shriek of despair from the mass of humanity. Can you not hear them, see them, — how they clutch at one another's throats for money!"

A shrill whistle from the locomotive broke the silence of the great forest. It died away like an echo under the high green vault. The cars rumbled over the rails, and, a few minutes later, Lyder drew up at the station.

Irene had intended to walk no farther

than to her friend, the large gray rock by the roadside. She had not even noticed it, — the poor rock on whose strong breast she had sat for hours dreaming and regaining her health. She had forgotten it for another friend.

Towards evening they were back again at Buena Vista.

It had been a delightful day for both of them. The forest had opened their hearts, and they had confided to each other feelings, thoughts, and desires which under other circumstances, with other surroundings, would perhaps have been uttered only after months of daily intercourse.

As Lyder carefully helped her down from the waggon, the soft narrow hand rested in his. How he wished to keep that little hand! But he conquered his emotions and said almost nonchalantly, —

"Miss Garland, if, after this experience, you do not consider a drive on my jolting waggon too rough to be bearable, I shall be happy to offer it to you again."

"Thanks," she said. "It has been very pleasant, thanks." She looked at the seat. "Why, I entirely forgot how dangerously high up I was." Then fearing lest he might draw the right conclusion from her words, she added, laughing: "But so it is; when one gets used to a thing, the danger of it is soon forgotten. I have noticed a small light shimmering high up there on the mountain towards Loma Prieta; I wondered if it were yours."

"Yes; and when I sit on the steps of my cabin, I can see the whole row of lights here at Buena Vista."

The level red rays of the setting sun fell among the trunks of the red-woods. It put fire to the windows of the buildings, and heightened the colours of the many-hued autumn attire of the oaks and the poison-ivy. Below lay the cañons in hazy purple shadows, one running into another, between the sun-glowing forest ridges brilliant with patches of autumn colours; while far, far beyond lay the ocean, barely visible through the evening mist.

Lyder's waggon rattled down a short slope and across the rocky bed of a rill. His horses knew they were homeward bound, they could not understand why they had been kept back so much all day, when they were so willing to go. But now they felt the lines slack, they used their opportunity and hurried up the steep, winding road towards home.

Lyder hastened to light the lamp. Then he put fire to the large brush-piles; — would she not be looking out for his beacon?

The fire cast a red glare over the hills. It cracked and snapped in the green limbs, and the sparks whirled into the star-lit autumn sky. A faint echo answered from the ravines, and the fox barked over by Loma Prieta. Scared by the fire, it hurried back to its lonesome haunts.

And he wondered if Irene was watching his fire; perhaps she was leaning on the balustrade of the piazza, wishing herself up there in the solitude of the mountains, for

had she not said she sometimes, like himself, felt a desire to lose herself in the wild-woods, never to return to the world?

Seating himself not far from the fire, he watched the blue jets of hissing flame emerging from the glowing logs. He saw in there a golden dream-castle with many halls, one behind the other, and a strange light shining from all directions. The halls extended, as he more and more became lost in his dream; they became the abode of his materialised thoughts, listlessly gliding from one to the other, restlessly passing one another; some with fair, open faces, others wrapt in dark veils, through which glowed the reflection in their eyes of the red light. Ah, they were all his thoughts, these shapes, — his thoughts from away back, when he was but a child, up to the present day. They glided back and forth without sound, in an endless chain, through these immense, glowing halls of his memory; and there was one among them who persisted in passing near to him with arms outstretched as if

feeling for something in the deep darkness — ah, perhaps a darkness which was her own.

Was she searching for him, that tall figure in the black veil trailing behind her?

Could she feel his nearness, yet never touch him?

What separated them; and which one of his thoughts was she?

He knew it — she must be looking for him in vain. To be sure, he had once enjoyed life with her!

To be sure, she was once *his!*

"Cruel, cruel, cruel!" he murmured. His heart filled with sympathy for that figure groping so helplessly in the dark, despite all this glowing light of his dream-castle.

What did she want with him? Those slender arms looked as if they wanted to embrace. Was it perhaps for the entrance to the hall she searched, that she might escape, — slip quietly outside, into that blue twilight with the tall poplars against the deep

blue sky, — outside and past the river of life, by which his castle lay?

His eyes left her for a while and wandered among those other shapes, some of whom were far, far back, almost disappearing in the distance, so large were the halls.

And so many women among them! He could not recognise them all — no, not by far — despite their ideal forms and the beauty of their faces.

But by his side, close to him, with her arm in his, leaning trustfully on him, safe and happy, looking into his eyes with love — the little girl from Buena Vista.

She had entered the door of his castle when least expected. Was she ready to spend her life with him; not asking, Who are those shapes, the dark ones, and those whose faces shine with light? Was it enough to her that they were his?

The wind sighed in the tall poplars out in the blue twilight by the river of life. It carried with it, through the wide open portals of his castle, the fragrance of night-

blooming flowers whose fruits were poisonous, and the nightingale mingled its warblings with the music from the harp of night.

Then the tall, dark figure with outstretched arms glided still closer to him and laid her hands in his. Dropping her veil, she stood silent, pale as death — Guri Hakonsdatter!

Her smile was sad, but full of love. She nodded forgiveness to him, never speaking. One long look of love, which encircled also the little girl by his side. Taking her hand, she looked earnestly into her eyes and again at him, dropped her own hands to her side, and passed away.

She met another shape by the door — a man. Hand in hand they glided out into the blue twilight and passed far beyond the river of life.

"My father, oh, my father!" whispered Lyder, and awoke from his dreams weeping.

It was very quiet all around. The deep night rested over the land. A few small red lights shimmered in the distance, far, far below.

His brush-piles had dwindled into heaps of glowing embers, over which crept a low, flickering blue flame. No air was stirring, not the least sigh in the chaparral.

They had been very close to him, — those two toward whom he had sinned the most. But had he not read forgiveness in their eyes?

He felt nervous and dazed, dropping so suddenly back to reality. And the desolation of the mountains fell over him like a cold breath from a cave, arousing in him fear. He listened for sounds. The least snapping of a dry twig would not have escaped him, so greatly intensified seemed his hearing.

Yes, they had forgiven him, those two towards whom he had sinned the most; but was not there a third to reckon with, — civilisation, society with its laws of selfishness and arrogance that breed hypocrisy? Those lights away yonder, — what strife, what greed behind those glowing embers of human homes! What hypocrisy often between man and wife!

Sitting there in the stillness of the mountain solitude, there seemed of a sudden an abyss between him and the world. On his side, the simple open-faced spontaneity of nature; beyond, a narrow creed which tried to bind human thoughts. "Ah, but the human heart," he spoke, and put his hand over his own, "it beats, it beats; and when you think it the tamest, of a sudden it runs like a wild horse over the level pampas. Forgotten are all its learnings and the pains it paid for them."

His thoughts wandered back to his old home and to bygone days. There lay a sadness over it. He compared it to-night with so many other homes he had known, some yet aglow in his thoughts with the happiness they had breathed. He wondered why he had not then seen the great difference between them and his own. Man is a beast of habit — he excused himself. He wondered if he had really ever experienced full happiness. He had often started out with a light heart on its road of song, but

suddenly a broad shadow fell across it, unexpected, and cooling his ardour. Ah, if he ever could free himself of all shadows! feel such joy as Nature breathes when spring returns after the long, gray northern winter. Love was missing in his old home. He saw it clearly now, how its absence had frozen two hearts. Should his also die the same death? He was young yet; life lay before him. No, no; he would nurse the child well, give it all the liberty it wanted, see it develop into greater and greater beauty,— blessed little child of his heart! He put his fingers into its curly locks and called it names of endearment. How pure and fragrant was its childish body, anointed by Nature herself! It stood on the crest of the heights of simplicity, looking all over the world laughing.

Was there any danger of its ever straying away from him,— perhaps, when it grew older, tired of him, seek farther into the wilderness to heights where he could not reach? Had he better make it promise to stay, or

were it safer yet to tie its wings, put a chain around its ankle, and stake it by the hut, lest some day, on returning home, he should find it gone?

"Silly fool!" he told himself. "You would find its dead body in the chains, and its soul gone, far too free for human fetters."

Love was truly with him now. Did he not love that little girl from Buena Vista? How dared he, struggling with poverty in this wilderness?

Yet, if she loved him, as he knew she *could* love, what was all the rest? *Love conquers all!* She had inspired in him something which had made him nobler, stronger, more courageous; which in her nearness and in his thoughts of her excluded all sensuality, and left true passion, — that which elevates humanity above the beast.

"Oh me," he sighed, "Irene, Irene!" and his voice grew warm as he exclaimed to the night, "I *love* you, Irene!"

There was so much which before had been a mystery to him.

He saw now plainly what had been lacking in his old home; it was love, — love between man and wife. And the result? This cold haughtiness between his parents and his father's death.

All the lights among the hills were extinguished, save the one at Buena Vista.

It must be kept burning by one whose mind, like his own, was too full for sleep.

But that last light was also extinguished. He thought he saw it lighted again just for a second. The fox barked again without fear, for the fire had died away. The sound came very near. "Poor thing," said Lyder, "let it live; it is calling its mate." Then he remembered his chickens and hooted. An echo answered him from out of the darkness.

"Good-night — good-night, Irene." He waved his hand towards Buena Vista.

XX

THE first hard storm of the season was shaking off the last yellow leaves from the sycamores and oaks.

It had come unexpectedly after dark. The wind howled dismally in the forest, and roared like distant thunder in the deep cañons. It played aimlessly in the chaparral, but it played roughly, bending and twisting it with unrelenting boisterousness.

On such nights Lyder longed for his old home. Here was the same song of the storm; but in his native country, where the waves thundered over the naked cliffs, and the sea moaned as if in hellish pain, it was a wilder, grander one.

The second day of the storm, towards evening, Lyder was on his way to Buena Vista.

Irene had only three more days to stay.

There were no other guests now, and Lyder felt an irresistible desire to see her that very day, — they could enjoy the stormy evening together.

He had resolved to play for her; he would *make* her remember him.

The storm, which yet kept up its fury, inspired him with weird happiness.

Below him the dark red-woods roared and sighed. The gray, infuriated air swept thundering through the cañons. A gray-headed forest giant toppled over, crashing into the surrounding trees, strewing needles and red bark all around. It sang its swan-song when, after having withstood thousands of former storms, it fell at last with a sigh that reverberated among the great hills.

And under the low sky of heavy rolling clouds two gray eagles worked up against the wind. Uttering their wild, piercing cries, they gave in to the greater force, and, soon overtaken by the down-pour, sailed off towards the mountains.

Lyder braved the storm well. He was clad in a long oilcoat and high rubber boots, with a yellow southwester pressed down on his head.

Strong and happy, he looked out over the storm-swept country. With his light hair curling about his ears, he resembled one of those brave pilots of his native coast.

His breast rose and fell with enjoyment. His whole body and his soul felt refreshed; he laughed aloud when the storm sometimes took hold of him and he had to bend forwards not to lose his balance.

When he entered the gate at Buena Vista, he saw that the rain and wind had played sorry havoc with the chrysanthemums. Large moss-covered limbs had fallen from the old oaks across the roads. The water was washing deep gullies in the loose soil of the vineyard; the yellow leaves of the sycamores lay in large wet piles against anything which had offered them resistance. In the woods the storm roared incessantly.

Irene entered the parlour, and greeted him

warmly in her charming, unconventional way, extending both her hands to him.

"There is no one I would rather see than you to-night," she said. "I know how you delight in this storm, you Norsemen are such a romantic race. How it must take you back to your fiords you told me about the other day. You need only shut your eyes, and imagine that this roar in the forest and cañons is the voice of the sea — or music — pardon me — music of the sea — to be in your own Norseland. I 've been longing to see you to-day and hear you play, but had no thought you would come in this stormy weather, though you told me what a gray-weather bird you are."

"Well, you see," he answered frankly, "I knew you had but a short time to stay, and I wanted to see you once more before you should pass out of my life, perhaps for ever. In this country it seems the common fate to meet and part. You are a restless people, singularly devoid of attachment to your homes, even to the spot where you were

born. You say good-bye to old surroundings as easily as we foreigners depart from a hostelry in which we have stayed for a night."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, "your way of looking at a home as a place where you are to stay for life and where your children and children's children will enjoy the shade and fruits of the trees you planted, is certainly a more happy one. But are you sure it is the most broadening, most civilising way to live?

"It certainly has its charms, and so has our moving way of life. Not that *I* enjoy it, for I am a great home-body, but I know that nothing is more educating than to travel, meet new people, live under new conditions, see new countries with their people, and other manners; — fight the battle of existence, to-day on the hill-tops, to-morrow on the prairie, one day far to the north, then again under a southern sky. And," she added roguishly, "I am aware that some Norsemen even, despite their — h'm — great stolidity, follow that call from

afar, from the romantic unknown with its adventurous charms; and among them a Mr. van Meeren, whose longing for that alluring — let me say it out, please — alluring unknown brought him from the city of Bergen in the gray land of the Norsemen to settle on a *high*" (she stood on tiptoe, to make it more emphatic) "hilltop on the western slope of this continent, and — "

Lyder interrupted her laughingly, —

"Ah, yes; but, Miss Garland, it was for the very sake of finding a home of his own, where he might stay for life with his children and children's children coming after him, that this son of the old vikings harboured in this out-of-the-way place. There was something lacking in his life at home which he hoped to find out here." His tone and look became more earnest. "Those high, dark mountains were beginning to grow oppressive; they seemed to close around me. I felt almost crushed under the weight of an accursed public opinion, and I dared not be myself; and that

is the most terrible existence of all to me. I wanted to get where the country is large, and people are farther apart; where I would feel the omnipresence of Nature and not society; where I could live in sympathy with *her* laws, according to my own faith in morals, in everything, according to the dictation of my own conscience. I cannot be for ever hampered in every direction by somebody else's opinion of right and wrong, by the opinion of the great, ignorant majority, — for what is right to me is perhaps wrong to another.

"The only sin is sin against nature, and it includes harm to our fellow beings. The requirements of nature's laws are very simple. They are not written on stone-slabs in so many paragraphs. The law of nature is inscribed on the star-spangled vault above us; it is in the sea, in forests and mountains, in the air; and in the case of humanity, in flesh and blood, and their issue, — the soul, the mind. And the concert of it all, the book of nature, that

great book where each part of everything constitutes a word in the chapters of her eternal history, — from the smallest atom or the thinnest aëriform fluid to what we suppose to be the highest, man."

Irene sat on the piano-stool facing Lyder, who had sunk into one of the deep-seated armchairs. She listened with apparent interest. There was something in him which she never had found in any one before, — a directness, an outspokenness combined with an extraordinary emotionalism. That he was a strong animal, she could not doubt; but it did not make her afraid of him, for the over-soul in him was stronger than the animal. Already she had confessed to her heart that he had — unknown to himself, she doubted not — gained a great power over her; indeed, did he but know it, he had but to look at her to make her his for ever.

How Irene admired that power in him!

The storm howled in the red-wood trees, the rain beat against the windows.

It grew dusk in the large parlour at Buena Vista.

The proprietor, an old, asthmatic Frenchman, was in the office gambling with some friends. His large, fleshy wife, the amiable Madame Pellier, kept watch by his side, deeply interested in the game.

"*Sacrement*," he said to her, as he glanced out into the storm, "*sacrement, ma chère.*" And his thoughts hurried back to his cards.

In the slowly darkening parlour Lyder had seated himself at the piano; Irene sat close to him in an easy-chair, resting one of her slender white hands on the case next to the key-board, looking dreamily into vacancy.

And the storm roared in the woods; it howled in the large chimney, throwing the sparks into the room.

From the treble sounded a strange, happy melody, sometimes shrill and stubborn; then again melancholy, weird and loving, moving lower and lower by degrees, reaching the bass, growing wilder, more boisterous, roar-

ing like thunder among the mountains. Then came lulls through which sounded the lamentation of the huldre.

Lyder leaned forward over the keys, when he commenced to play; but as his inspiration grew, he gazed straight before him. His thoughts came chaotically; he untangled them harmoniously, weaving into them old folk-songs, and many melodious themes of Norse composers.

It became a wild dance over the mountain-heath, with far-off vistas of fiords and peaks, a dance with the huldre, the beautiful lass, who wept when she laughed, who moaned when she sang, who looked loving when she hated; beautifully shaped and tempting, with large blue eyes, when her hand rested in her victim's, but who, when he thought he could embrace her, showed her heifer's tail and suddenly disappeared, leaving but the sound of laughter behind her.

There came a lull in the storm without, as if it were gathering its breath to continue with renewed strength.

Lyder's eyes fell on the narrow white hand resting close to the key-board; she had not moved it; and with the quieting of the storm came a calm in his thoughts, his melodies became limpid, loving, captivating. From that pale hand his eyes glided along the slender arm, moving from the shoulder in quick succession to the mouth and the eyes, — those velvety brown eyes with the light from the fireplace reflected in them. There they lingered; while the melody rose again with the storm, — not so wild as before, more human; more and more caressing, even in its strength.

How was it that he dared to keep his eyes on hers? How was it that the melodies and harmonies glided away from him without the least effort? He had never played so before. And that white hand — how did it happen? — rested at last on his arm, and those large eyes glittered like embers in the reflection of the fire, much closer to his; and as his own hand slipped from the keys, he heard a woman's tender voice gently

say, "I feel so strangely happy. Mr. van Meeren, your music has intoxicated me." And she put both hands before her eyes, then dropped them in her lap and said, half in revery, "How beautiful — how beautiful!"

And he did not embrace her? Not even then?

Perhaps he was afraid that she, like the huldre, might disappear, and leave nothing but a ringing peal of laughter behind her.

The embers on the hearth cast a red glare, reflecting from the glass-covered pictures and the large mirror at the end of the room.

It was not so dark but that they could very well discern one another's expressions.

Outside the storm continued to roar with short lulls between the thundering showers, when the forest softly sighed, as if tired after its struggle with the wind. But suddenly again every sound seemed whirled away, and the storm took hold, leaving nothing but the cry and grumble of the suffering woods.

Lyder rose, and stood with his elbow upon the mantelpiece, his head resting on his hand.

Irene moved over into a low rocking-chair in front of the fire. Leaning her head backwards, she rocked slowly.

She felt as when, after a long sickness, one is for the first time brought out into a glowing summer evening.

After a long silence she said, —

"I saw your fire the other night." Then she added slowly, "It looked so pretty from here, so weird, — I thought of the old Norse beacons with their flaring red flames in time of war. I don't know how I came to think of war, for the evening was extremely peaceful, — so filled with soothing music, as you would have said. Still, there was something wild about that fire so far up on the mountain. I imagined that the witches were dancing around it, it was so very red. Then I thought, 'Now Mr. van Meeren is sitting by it, dreaming, listening to the voices of night.' You know you have told me you were

a dreamer. Was I mistaken?" she asked, looking up at him.

Lyder smiled. "Indeed they were; the witches danced that night around my fire, yes, into the very midst of it."

"And did not scorch their brooms?"

"Oh, no, but — there was one circling close to me and another on my arm; the first was heavily veiled, the other" — he stopped for a second, looking hard at her — "my fairest dream."

"And who was she with the veil, who hid her face?" Irene asked gently. "Had she come from afar to meet you up on your hill-top by your red fire? And the other, — who was she? Merely phantoms, both of them, creations of your mind?"

He shook his head with a melancholy smile as he was going to answer; but she spoke before him. Laughing, she said, —

"Was it harmonies embodied, — *Mol* and *Dur?*"

"You cannot guess it. They were not

phantoms of my mind." She saw how serious he looked as he continued: "The first — the first was Guri Hakonsdatter. Guri Hakonsdatter," he repeated slowly, as in thought, looking into the fire. "And she came to bring forgiveness to me, — forgiveness, Miss Garland."

He seated himself in a low chair close to her.

"She came to give peace to my mind, — the poor, noble girl who is no more. Can you listen to the saddest story of my life?" he asked, looking straight at her. "You are not like other women I have met in this country. I feel safe in speaking to you about anything I choose."

She nodded, and said simply, "Please tell me."

So Lyder told her the story of himself from far back, and that of Guri Hakonsdatter, ending it thus, —

"She took the life of her own child, — my child. They found her dead, where she had hidden herself from the merciless, spying eye

of society. Can you wonder that I fled away to the wilderness?"

He stopped suddenly, yet did not take his eyes away from her.

Irene sat pale, looking into the dying embers; then she slowly raised her eyes, tear-filled, and in a voice vibrating slightly, asked, —

"And the other one, who was she?"

The storm kept up its fury. The rain lashed the windows; there was utter darkness outside in the wild night, with the babble of running water during the short calms.

After a long pause Lyder arose and said slowly, still looking at her, —

"The other one, Miss Garland, is but a dream."

There sounded heavy, thumping steps in the hall, and presently Madame Pellier entered with a small lamp in her hand.

"Ah, my great God! Excusé me, Miss Garlánd. I was so very busy in ze kitchén looking after zat no good girl, zat I forgot lighting ze lamps, — excusé me."

She laid a large piece of wood on the fire.

"It is a storm terrible, it is, and Mistre Van had a long walk to see you, Miss Garland." She spoke in a significant tone.

"Yes, and it is time for him to leave now, my good Madame Pellier," said Lyder, gayly. "I must go home and see if my chickens have blown down from the trees."

Madame Pellier slapped her knee, opening her eyes extremely wide.

"And are Mistre Van's chickéns out in zat weazér?" she asked in amazement.

"My chickens do exactly as they please, Madame Pellier."

"Yes, yes, yes, an' zey lay no eegs," answered the old woman, laughing hoarsely.

After lighting the lamps, she left the room, casting a short, scrutinising glance at the young people.

Lyder buttoned his jacket, preparatory to putting on his oilcoat.

As he started for the door, Irene suddenly laid her hand on his arm.

He did not want her to go out in the cold hall, but she, smiling, disobeyed him.

He took her hand in his, and held it for a moment. He longed to put his arm around her, only for once — for a first and last embrace. If he only might say a few words which would tell her all he felt for her! Ah, but how dared he, with all the experience which lay behind him,— poor and struggling too, — and she?

With great effort he conquered the impulse.

He encased himself in the outer coat, and said lightly, —

"Well, Miss Garland, I suppose I shall not see you again before you leave, so I will say good-bye and thank you for your friendliness to me. I — I have enjoyed your society so very much. Indeed, I hope to meet you again, when spring comes; and — before I go, I want to ask you one favour — no, two — may I write to you and — call you my friend?"

"May you?" She looked at him with

her eyes brimful of feeling. "You may, my friend. It will make me so happy. We are strangely alike; I feel as if I had known you long."

"Good-bye, Irene," he whispered, and touched her forehead lightly with his lips, "good-bye, my friend, — good-bye."

The wind slammed the door behind him, and he was gone.

The storm howled in the forest, and moaned in the deep dark cañons.

Irene stood for a second and gazed at the closed door. She reached out her arms towards it; then hid her face in her hands, looked around to see if she had been observed, and went to her room.

Going to the window, she looked out into the darkness, watching for his light to greet her; but all in vain.

Lyder reached his cabin after a hurried walk.

He had come to strange conclusions.

She had said so little, when he left. Was

it with her as with himself, — confused by love, — or did she doubt him, even feel afraid of him? No wonder if she did, he thought, after all he had told her about himself.

"Fool! fool! what a fool am I to be honest in a world of hypocrisy! My lad, why don't you howl with the wolves you live among, instead of being silly, sentimental, honest! You will never succeed, you will always have to struggle with poverty; and when you die, there will be no one to hold your head. Fool! fool! why don't you go out and smile to those whom you hate, creep before those who are rich, flatter, swindle, — why don't you kill that feeling in you! You must not feel, my lad, you must be hard and manly, — shut your eyes to nature, to art. Business, *business*, money! To be unscrupulous means success!

"But this little girl from Buena Vista? Oh, if she were a little homeless lass, but otherwise just as now — so tender, so beautiful, so natural.

"Irene! Irene!"

XXI

BY next day the storm had spent its force.

The third morning the sun rose in a cloudless sky.

Irene Garland sat in the Buena Vista coach beside Madame Pellier. They were waiting for the landlord, who never was on time.

Away up on the mountain a faint column of smoke rose straight into the clear sky. There was no flame visible, and the blue smoke melted into the pure, fresh air.

"Oh," thought Irene, "if I might climb out of this waggon and walk through the fragrant forest and chaparral this early morning; come upon him unawares, surprising him at his work, stand there and look at him for a little while, and then call his name softly. Would he not open his arms, would he not cry for happiness, 'Irene! Irene!'"

She loved to hear him speak her name with that little foreign intonation.

"Oh, my friend, I read your message; good-bye, good-bye, my Norseman!"

Mr. Pellier, who at last had arrived, took his place in the waggon, clicked his tongue, and the horses started off at a lively gait. It was all down hill towards the station.

At the turn of the road, where it entered the forest, Irene saw for the last time Lyder's beacon. The smoke rolled in thick clouds into the deep blue canon.

Here, too, was the large gray rock by the roadside, where she had met him for the first time. And all around — the great forest which he had helped her to inhabit with thoughts. Everything everywhere spoke to her of him. Unexpectedly the tears began to fall. She tried her best to stop them, but with the effort burst into sobs.

Madame Pellier and her worthy husband looked greatly astonished. Irene strove again to compose herself.

"I really can't help it, Mrs. Pellier," said she; "I have spent such a heavenly summer at Buena Vista. I shall long for it all so very much, I shall indeed."

The whistle of a locomotive sounded near at hand. The echo died away, and soon after the train rushed on again, rumbling through the woods.

XXII

HIS first letter.

His letter. It lay in her lap; she had fled with it to her room, — her own quiet little room, away from the noise of the city.

She forgot where she was; her fancy had carried her to the mountains.

"*His* letter," she whispered. His thoughts, his longings, his mountains, his air, his forest, his cabin, his flowers by the side of the house, — the large pansies from the seed his sister had sent him, — and his music!

He told about it all in that letter. Her hands lay upon it, but her thoughts were with *him*.

And was there not something else in that letter? Had he not written it between the lines and across the words, in the margins, the corners, in the hasty strokes of his pen, where he had not even given himself time

to lift it from the paper, where the words were connected like his thoughts — all of it blurred by — love — *his* love!

How could she know? Not in a single place was that word written, and still it was everywhere.

She must read the letter once more. Perhaps she was mistaken; perhaps it was her own love and not his, which blurred the writing.

And she took up again the simple yellow sheets of manila paper.

It had a fresh, pure, unartificial fragrance, just like the forest. She kissed it, and felt not in the least alarmed at herself for doing so.

Yes, here was one place — *love.*

"How much I should *love* to go with you once more through the forest, only farther, higher than we went before. We would walk into deepest solitude — I, with your hand in mine, assisting you that you might not fall — far from roads and trails; how I should *love* it!"

Was nature, then, not enough for him who loved nature more than any one else?

If she were there with him, would he love *it* more because he loved *her* more?

"Oh, Irene Garland, what a philosopher you are!"

Nevertheless, she kissed the letter once more and was happy.

Speedily she sent him an answer; while her heart was yet full of the feelings his letter had inspired.

Irene longed for spring. Her brother would then go away on his yearly business trip to Mexico, and she would flee back to the mountains.

More and more, in her letters to Lyder, did she lay her heart open before him, wishing him to know her as she was. How thankful she felt toward him for understanding her so well! In fact, did they not both, day by day, understand one another better?

And he had kissed her!

She joyed to remember that, but felt thankful to him that it was her forehead and not her lips he had kissed. It was much better so.

Every Sunday morning George Garland went alone to Sunday-school. It pained him that Irene went her own way to her room, where she wrote letters. He had spoken to her about it, and her answer had been anything but satisfactory to him.

But when afternoon came, she would lay her arm in his, and persuade him to take her out among the sand hills, to the park and the ocean.

George Garland found it rather tiresome, this walking back and forth on the beach. But he loved his sister very much, and she showed him in many ways how much *she* enjoyed it.

"Is it not beautiful, George? See, see that great blue wave coming in here; I wish it would dash over me."

And on her other side walked a third person, who enjoyed it all with her, one to whom she gave her best thoughts.

"Even if he never becomes more than my friend," she would say to herself, "what great happiness! But he loves me, loves me, and I — *I?*"

XXIII

LYDER'S letters came often and regularly.

She read them over and over again during the long rainy days of winter. They gave her much food for thought. He spoke freely to her, as to a good old comrade. Daring in his opinions and ideas, she in the beginning often rebelled against them. Then, reconsidering, she saw their unconventional fairness and simplicity, coloured with the deepest conviction. They became revelations of liberty to her. They had the free, spontaneous freshness of the wooded heights where he lived, and with a jubilant heart she made his thoughts her own. She began to see two widely separated classes of people in the world, — those who are in the majority and those who are among the few, — the ones the free-thinking, — the others the many-imitating; that she had entered among the

few, and before her lay a wide long-forgotten country to be explored anew, — its fathomless spring of simplicity to be sounded, its tales of the infinite to be listened to. She kept his letters in her desk, all in perfect order as they came.

George Garland had long ago become suspicious about these letters for his sister, which came to his office with the same postmark.

At last he could conceal his curiosity no longer.

"Who in the world are all these letters from, Iry?"

The question came unawares, though she had expected it long ago. He was to her both a father and brother, and Irene blushed.

"Oh, from a friend," she answered a little shortly.

"Why, of course. I know you are not in business."

"How do you know?" she replied a little saucily. "I might have invested my money

in forest lands and fruit-farms, for all you know, and these letters are inquiries from intending purchasers."

"Puh."

"No, I'll tell you. I am going to be married, that is it," she said roguishly. "There is a middle-aged millionaire with a spotted history, but a fine home, fine carriages, etc. He is very ugly, with a lobster nose and a wide girth, but — oh me! — all the money he has! And when you have *money*, you know, you have everything; some people even seem to think they can bribe St. Peter with it, when some day they knock at the portal of heaven. I have promised to go back in spring to the redwoods and marry him. Perhaps you know him by name — of course you do — Lyder van Meeren."

"Why, Irene, what is the matter with you? You speak so lightly about such things. You — you — it is not becoming at all; you really alarm me sometimes."

She put her arm around his neck. "Don't

you know what Emerson says? — 'The things we now esteem fixed, shall, one by one, detach themselves like ripe fruit from our experience and fall. The wind shall blow them none knows whither — '

"George, you are such a — well, what shall I call you? — so very kind, but so unsophisticated, though you are much older than I. Can't you see that I am in love, deeply, deeply in love, — that my whole heart is filled with it, that it makes me happy, that these letters are treasures to me; that I long for spring, when I may go back to my forests, where I regained my health after that long siege with the fever, last winter?"

She spoke half earnestly, half in jest. George thought her more of a conundrum than ever. He had really felt worried about her lately; despite her happiness, her disregard for, her ridicule of, old established religion and social institutions, he did not consider it ladylike, to say the least. She had certainly strange notions about things.

One evening, walking with him through the streets, she asked, —

"Who are all these lonely women gliding into darkness and shady places?"

"Nothing for *you* to know anything about, Iry."

"No?"

"No."

"Oh, how I long to get back to the woods again and my millionaire!"

"But, Iry, I do not like the way you speak lately."

"No? What do you like, then? Do *you* like to look at the sallow, hardened faces of these women? These overdressed, audacious-looking girls — almost children? Do you like that hoarse laughter coming from these places we pass? Do you mean to say *you* are a Christian, and yet do not rise against it all, — you and your church, — against a social system which breeds such wickedness; against this fearful, this hellish power of money? The more I see and think of it, the more do I despise such a church!"

"But, Irene, you certainly ought to moderate your expressions somewhat; it seems to me — you — "

"Moderate? George; moderate? Why not say, shut my eyes, lie to myself, and try to think that you are all stepping in the footprints of your Master? That all this darkness, with its horrid fumes and shrieks, is — well, rather bad, to be sure, but — such is the world — there must always be sin. Bah! it is disgusting. O George, if you would think — *think*. When I see these faces of women who sell themselves for lucre, I long — yearn to be back in the forest, where it is quiet, so pure and beautiful, where civilised humanity has not been able to gather its filth, where I feel that which is good in me grow stronger, where I feel I have a soul. And if the forest should capture me — or that millionaire, George, so I wanted to remain there — I wish you would marry; you know whom I mean. I know she is fastidious; but now you are certainly able to furnish

her with the luxury she needs; and if Alice loves you, she will excuse the lack of more, and wait a few years for the rest. You and she are in many ways so much of the same mind. You both take an interest in church-work. I — I — do not like her *very* much, you know; but what matters it? *I* shall be with my millionaire, and when you come to visit us in our forest castle, I shall be very kind to her, because she is yours."

They had reached the door. He made no reply to her, but went straight to his room. He was tired, he said.

The fog drifted in from the ocean, and settled over the bay. All night the fog-horn kept up its tooting; but Irene dreamed of the mountains. She saw a Norse beacon on a California hill. She walked toward it, deeper and deeper into the forest — no end to it, no nearer the beacon. Terrible anxiety filled her — she *must* get there or die — the hardened, haggard faces of thousands of sold women were behind her — how could she return? "Irene! Irene!" it was

his voice, so strong, so manly. Deeper and deeper into the woods she went, higher and higher, to a small cabin with pansies by the wall, — large, fine ones from Helga's seeds.

A blue, blue sky and millions of stars!

XXIV

IT was an early morning in spring.

The evening before, Irene had arrived at Buena Vista.

She had walked through the forest to her old friend the gray rock; but to-day she was going farther, — to-day she would reach those sacred places of absolute solitude whence Pan's voice so often had whispered to her.

Lyder's beacon had welcomed her last night from away up towards Loma Prieta. He had written he would not be at the station. He could not meet her there, as he would wish to; everybody present would read his feelings.

In his last letter he had asked her if she would be his sister, for Helga was so far away.

Irene had returned with a strange feeling of anxiety. There was a moment when she

doubted whether it was best to return; but just as quickly did she make up her mind that it was the very thing for her to do.

And to-day she would see him!

She felt much better acquainted with him now through his letters; yet she had flattered herself with understanding him perfectly when she left the red-woods.

She had not found desirable qualities only. Oh, no; there were great faults peeping through, and she loved him for those faults.

She rose very early, while there was yet barely a faint blush on the sky where the sun would rise above the crest of Loma Prieta. The faintest kind of a blue haze rested over the mountains. The forest, with its faint hum of air and running water, seemed to be dreaming; while a few delicate veils of vapour rose out of the deep cañons. The orioles sang their love song in the oaks. The air was saturated with the fragrance of wild blooms and woodlands, and the humming-birds buzzed past her in swift flight, hunting for the gayest flowers.

He had said he would come early, but what was *early?* Perhaps he thought she was a late riser, and it would yet be hours before she should see him.

Madame Pellier called her to breakfast, but she excused herself, — she did not feel hungry, she said — she had not slept quite well, she never did the first night in a strange place; she would make up for it another time, try her best to make her stay unprofitable to Madame Pellier. Irene forced a little laughter, and Madame Pellier shook her head, — she understood it all.

"*Sacrement!* she is in love wiz zat Va-n," she said to her husband, who looked at her vacantly. It always took him a long time to get perfectly awake in the morning, if indeed he ever did.

Irene heard footsteps on the gravel walk, — firm steps of a man.

He turned the corner by the acacias, walking leisurely with his hands in the pockets of his short jacket.

He had already seen her from the road.

He knew she was there waiting for him, but dared not look up — not before he was at the foot of the steps.

He had intended to show her in one glance all his happiness in being with her again. But, as he held her hand, only a few commonplace utterances escaped him; he even remarked that it was a fine morning! But she did not resent it; she seemed to understand him.

"How I have longed for you," she said. "I have been standing here for over an hour, and it was *so* long — waiting for my friend."

Ah, that wonderful intonation on the words — *my friend!*

"I saw your beacon," she said, as they walked down the gravel-path toward the gate. "I watched it till it smouldered away, then I felt tired; and yet I could not sleep, not till toward morning, when I suddenly awoke with a great fear — I dreamt I had overslept, and you were gone."

"Indeed? Gone? — not much danger of

that, my friend. I would wait patiently a long time if I knew certainly you would come once."

She looked at him, but he compelled himself to look away.

He was taking very long steps; he was nervous to get somewhere, and she tripped beside him, as best she could, for a while.

"Oh," she breathed, "you go too fast."

He smiled and slackened his gait, then bethought himself and took her hand.

The fragrant, moist air vibrated in the long, narrow sunbeams falling between the dark tree-trunks, gilding in spots the soft carpet of brown needles.

They walked into deep ravines and out again, — always higher, higher, with narrow vistas between the tree-tops of shady and sun-gilded forest-covered ridges. Now and then they were closed in under the high green vault, among immense straight pillars, seemingly an endless labyrinth of them.

She wore a broad-rimmed straw hat, fastened to her hair with a long pearl-headed

pin. She was a little pale at first, but soon the blood rushed to her cheeks. Her eyes glittered with a wonderful darkness in the shade of the forest.

They were silent for a long while. They reached a large, open spot covered by a many-coloured carpet of flowers.

He stuck yellow poppies into her dark hair.

He did not ask her if he might; and she did not forbid him.

The gray squirrels barked at them from the tall trees, but they themselves had very little to say.

"Is this the way to your cabin?" she asked after a while.

"Yes, a short cut."

"Is this where you used to dream and long for home?"

"No, not here. And how did you enjoy your stay in the city?" he asked, as if she had not told him, time and time again in her letters, that she yearned to get away from there.

"My friend," she answered, "remember we

are now walking toward the 'Heights of Simplicity'; you gave them that name yourself, and here you come to me and ask such a question, — I, who in thoughts telegraphed you, and in my letters have told you all about it and all about myself."

"Don't scold," he said, a little rueful; then, taking a long step, added, "Come, let us be happy."

"I am," she answered with simple conviction.

It gladdened his heart, and he sang. Then they walked on for a while in silence — spellbound by thoughts.

"When you come to the spot where you wrote so many of your letters to me, please tell me."

"I wrote them everywhere."

"Did you?" she said, thankful.

He nodded.

Coming out of deep thoughts, he asked abruptly, —

"Is it ever right to begrudge ourselves the fulness of love?"

"I must answer you with another question, Which is the greatest simplicity?"

"To love, and openly — but, oh, there are considerations."

"Most of which are hollow. See here," she added, grasping fervently both hands full of flowers and grasses, — "*They* proclaim all of themselves to this wilderness, they throw their fragrance to the winds and fear not."

He nodded his acquiescence.

Then they talked over the letters they had exchanged. She pictured to him the rapture of his first. He held her hand closer and thanked God for her love.

"It was well you came," he said quietly; "everything has grown more beautiful. Ah, I even look better in my own eyes."

"And I — *I!*" she sang it out gleefully. "You have helped me across the divide, and I see the full clear sunlight of a simpler world shining in our faces."

He sang to her a little melody of his own which one lonesome evening had grown out

of his soul at the reading of a rhythmic verse.

They bared their feet, when they reached the brook.

"These polished pebbles are made for me to play with," she said, with an almost child-like expression; "they are wet and cool and glossy, nature's kiss upon them and nature's dream-talk about them — some day they 'll reach the sea."

But in his heart was a great struggle. He wished, and yet wished not, that she would help him to be strong. Instead of it, she made him love her ever more. Ah, she had stepped across the threshold, and become part of his whole soul. How could he then ever ask her to return — for his own sake and for hers?

They stepped out of the woods, crossed a narrow ravine where Pan sat in a long-needled pine playing his pipe, looking wistfully at them.

They walked into the blooming chemisal, where his bees droned and where in the sunshine the wild sage confided its warm thought

to the breezes. They walked on slowly and dreamily in the warmth of the day and the warmth of their hearts, — he concerned, she in simplest happiness.

"I have come back — I have come back," she cried suddenly out of her overflowing emotions, "and it is all welcoming me, and I give you all of myself, oh, wild, wild hills!" Her eyes filled with tears. Those were the tears of gladness. They blur one's vision sometimes on great occasions in life, yes, even a man's.

So Lyder pressed his hands over his eyes, and complained of the dazzling light after the deep shade of the woods.

"See!" — he spoke of a sudden, — "over yonder in my cabin."

"Come, come," she cried, "we are on the roof of the hills, with all the intricate world below us."

"There stands the throne of simplicity, — yonder gray rock," he broke in.

"Yes, hurry, hurry, lest we lose a single moment of life."

"For such as these are precious," he added with deepest conviction.

"How cozy it looks here," she exclaimed, as they stood by the low steps; "and there are more of Helga's pansies."

"No, excuse me, those are yours."

"Indeed! Quite pretty, are they not? Ah me, and the view! the fragrance! Oh," she drew in long breaths, "how fresh and quiet." Her face beamed with happiness.

"Yes," he answered, — "yes, and peaceful. See that black smoke-cloud far to the northwest. That is above San Francisco Bay. I have often watched it in clear weather, and I felt sorry for my friend that she was under it. I hoped that she was longing, not alone for me, but also for all this," — he made a sweeping gesture, — "all this blessed country."

"And here you live?"

"Yes, and sometimes feel happy."

"You ought to be so *always*."

"I could be — but — "

"Well — but?"

"I am poor."

"I thought you did not care for money."

"I don't."

"Well?"

"I do."

"Well?"

"And I don't."

"That tells it all, I am sure." And both laughed.

"Are you not going to invite me in?"

"You? — Well, I guess I shall have to."

"I must say you are polite this morning."

"I only wish to retaliate a little. But first, I must introduce you to a true friend of mine, who lives in the barn."

Lyder opened the barn-door, and a yellow shepherd dog bounced out at him and then at her, capering absurdly to show his joy.

"Miss Garland, this is — Vigo. Now pronounce it. You did well. And, Vigo, this is my little friend whom I have longed for, the one I so often told you about."

The dog seemed to understand; he wagged his bushy tail and gave a short bark.

Irene laughed. Rubbing his head, she entered into quite a lengthy dog-talk with him. Then turning to Lyder, "Why did you never tell me about Vigo in your letters?"

"I did not wish you to know I had even *one* companion; — you would n't have felt so sorry for me in my loneliness, if I had told you of him."

"Ah," she said musingly, "I see, I see. Now take me to your cabin."

As he swung the door open, "Here," said he, "is the bachelor's nest."

"How pretty!" She pulled the long pin out of her hat, as if ready to make herself at home.

He had decorated the room with wild flowers and branches of spruce. The Van Meeren mansion had not been so clean and orderly since it was built. The top of the home-made table was one mass of wild lilies and ferns. The home-made writing-desk seemed also a mass of blossoms. On the wall above Lyder's bed, in a

carved frame, surrounded by a wreath of straw-coloured chaparral-lilies was Irene's photograph.

"May I introduce you to my best and only friend?" he said, pointing to her picture.

"Did you do all this for her?"

"For her? For whom else in the world should I do it?" he asked frankly. "Out here is my kitchen; here are cold beans and a roasted chicken, and that is all you can have for dinner."

"Come, let us make a fire," she said; "it will be great fun. But are you not positively extravagant—a man who loves money as much as you do—to kill such a fat rooster all at once for one occasion?"

She punched it with a fork, laughing the while.

"Irene, you are absolutely silly," he said with a voice choking with happiness, gently tapping her fingers. "Hands off, will you?"

"Silly! not a bit of it. I am only a

child again. I was born anew a year ago and grew fast. To-day I merely babble; by and bye I will still be a child, but know more, and some day will put on the glasses of wisdom, yet a child — ever a child when, as you say, I have reached the wisdom of simplicity."

The shadows of the tall trees had grown long; some reached clear across the narrow ravines. A warm soft breeze came like a jolly young fellow, with fragrant blossoms in his hair, taking long and sudden skips and jumps over the hills from the south. It hummed in the long-needled pines by the cabin, and little brown birds twittered sleepily in the thickets.

"Now," said Lyder, "I will do my chores, then harness the horses and take you back, to save you that long walk. I am sorry to say it is getting late."

She cast an interrogative glance at him. "All right, but don't harness up quite yet; there are a few things I want to do in

the house, — clear up the dishes and wash them."

"No, no, you shall not."

"*Please* let me."

"No, I don't want you to bother with them. I can do the work myself, in the morning."

"Will you not let me have the pleasure of doing it?" she asked with a strange intonation.

"Yes — I will — yes;" and he walked off in search of his cow.

When he returned, the sun was setting.

Irene stood in the doorway of the cabin listening for the cow-bell. She had plucked some flowers and fastened them at her throat.

The fog-bank far to the northwest above San Francisco Bay had altered its shape; it looked like some fabled monster clutching the hills with its long arms.

Irene gave a few more energetic sweeps to the rough steps, and looked out over the undulating, forest-covered ridges.

"Peace — what peace!" she spoke to herself.

Lyder drove the cow into the barn and banged the door shut.

Irene called him, —

"Come quickly, I want you to see something before you harness the horses." And she ran towards him, took his hand, and led him towards the cabin.

Lyder sighed. He could not tell whether for pleasure or for some secret anxiety.

"Why do you sigh?" she asked quietly, with a wonderful expression in her voice and eyes. "Lyder, I have made up my mind about something — not now — long ago —"

"Yes, and what is it?" he asked in a low voice.

"You need not harness your horses, for, if I must go, I would rather *walk* away from here, and alone, to lose myself, get lost for ever."

He strove against his rising emotions.

"But — are you not tired?" There was an audible vibration in his voice.

"No—o, one could never be tired here. I should like to stay for ever." She laid her head on his shoulder; he felt her tremble.

"Irene."

"Lyder."

"You must not. Do not tempt me to aid you in throwing your life away. You do not know how I have fought with myself to-day to keep back some words which constantly threatened to escape. I am poor, and always shall be; there is nothing in me to make any one happy; I — I have before me a struggle for which I am not suited; it is too harsh, too rough for one so tender, so beautiful as you. Please be a good little girl, and do not pour oil on a fire I *must* smother."

"Because you are poor? Yes? Come on."

They entered the cabin.

"See how I have arranged things; they are more handy now, and — these flowers, you picked them for — for — "

She looked very serious. There was a little twitch in the dimples by her lips

"Irene! No, no, Irene! My darling; no, no — the world — struggle — ah, but *I love you!* Indeed I do, too much to want you to share your life with *me*. The world, what would

it say? You know how cruel would be its condemnation. You so pure; I could not have any one cast a disapproving look on *you*. You do not comprehend what sufferings it would bring you, — the contempt and disdain of others. True, there would be a few, a very few, perhaps, who would understand that what tied us together was the highest and best of all, — love. But consider the social curse!"

"Oh, yes, I know 'the solid majority' of the unthinking would condemn us, but we will be honest with the world, be just what we are; and I think the time is soon coming, in fact it is partly here, when honest conviction will be honoured and not condemned. But I fear not the world and its scorn; I have your love and my own, that is enough to make me happy. Tell me that I *must* go back to that smoke-cloud over yonder, and I will walk alone down the hill, into the forest, on and on and on — Oh me! Why not let me stay here? I must, *must*, dear. As long as you love me, will I stay, your struggles

also my struggles, your hopes and your pleasures also mine, — comrades in the battle of life. Oh, let me!"

Her voice choked, her eyes filled with tears; she tried to hide her face on his breast.

He led her gently out where the dew was falling, where the air was filled with the scent of millions of flowers, with the fragrance of woodland and mountain wilderness.

And he sang to her as he had never sung before. And when the mysterious voices of night awoke in the woods, he led her back step by step, to the cabin, she still with her head on his shoulder, and lips slightly parted, feeling herself wafted far beyond the harshness of daily life, — far away, where everything seemed fragrance, nothing but fragrance.

THE END.

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